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JOHN KEATS

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ENGLISH AND
AMERICAN
LITERATURE

STUDIES IN LITERARY
CRITICISM, INTER-
PRETATION AND
HISTORY



By C. H. SYLVESTER
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Part Thirteen

The Literary Powers

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In the preparation of Parts Thirteen, Fourteen and Fifteen we have used the classification adopted in Chas. F. Johnson's *Elements of Literary Criticism*, a most suggestive work published by the American Book Company. To this book the student is referred for a very readable and much fuller discussion.

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Unity

Unity in a Short Poem

The Greeks were a people in whom the love of the beautiful was highly developed. It manifested itself among other ways in the construction of temples, simple in design but elegant and impressive; in statuary that to-day stands unrivaled; in modeling household utensils and ornaments of unique shape and charming decoration. Their vases and urns were varied and graceful and frequently covered with lifelike figures in outline or silhouette. It is one of these urns that we must see before Keats as he writes his

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Thou still unravished bride of quietness!

Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy
shape

Of deities or mortals, or of both,

In Tempe¹ or the dales of Arcady?²

1. The vale of Tempe was a valley through which the river Peneus flowed. It lay between Mt. Olympus, the home of the gods, and Mt. Ossa. At times narrowing into a deep gorge with precipitous sides, it widens

Ode on a Grecian Urn

What men or Gods are these? What maid-
ens loath?

What mad pursuit? What struggles to
escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild
ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play
on;

Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.

Fair youth beneath the trees, thou canst not
leave

Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare.

Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal — yet do not
grieve:

She can not fade, though thou hast not thy
bliss;

Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

elsewhere into beautiful spots which the poets have described as having cool shades and verdant walks made delightful by flowers and the sweet songs of birds.

2. Arcadia was one of the largest provinces of that part of Greece south of the Gulf of Corinth. It is a region adapted to pasturage, and the early Arcadians were shepherds. Vegetation was rich and magnificent and the scenery beautiful. The inhabitants were deeply devoted to music and Pan was their chief deity. Their simple life has been a favorite subject for the poet as has been seen in the study of elegies.

Ode on a Grecian Urn

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that can not shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu;
And happy melodist, unwearied
Forever piping songs, forever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
Forever warm and still to be enjoyed,
Forever panting and forever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and
cloyed,
A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or seashore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets forevermore
Will silent be, and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate can e'er return.

O attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of
thought

Ode on a Grecian Urn

As doth eternity. Cold Pastoral !

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou
say'st

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,”—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to
know.

As we read the poem we must build up the pictured beauties of the urn and gather the thoughts they stirred in the poet's mind. What names does he give the urn in the first four lines? What is the significance of “foster-child of Silence and slow Time”? Can the urn speak? Is it of modern design? What is the significance of “Sylvan historian”? We know at once that the little figures on the urn have a pastoral story of olden times to relate and we are ready to enjoy its “flowery tale.” What is the subject of the next three lines? What phrases modify it? Where do the deities or mortals live? Why are Tempe and Arcady appropriate to mention? Is “leaf-fringed legend” an apt phrase for a pastoral epic? Where are the pipes and timbrels? Are they in use?

Where are the “soft pipes” he would have “play on”? How can their music be sweeter than that which is heard? Why cannot the youth leave his song nor the trees be ever bare? How can the lover forever love, his mistress be ever fair?

Studies

Is this idea shown in the preceding stanza?

Does the same idea continue through the third stanza? Is it found in the fourth stanza? In the last? State in your own words this idea, the consistent thought of every stanza. What is the "happy melodist forever piping songs"? What is above "all breathing human passion"? What is it that leaves a burning forehead, a parching tongue, and a sorrowful heart? Does the love he sees on the urn leave these?

Can you see the altar, the mysterious priest, the heifer all bedecked with garlands for the sacrifice? Is there a picture of a town or citadel on the urn? Why should Keats mention them, then? Why does he call it a "pious morn"? Why will the streets be always silent? Who is desolate? Why can no soul e'er return?

In the fifth stanza what is the attic shape? Why should it be called attic? What is the "fair attitude" that is addressed? Why does he call them "*marble* men"? What is the message Keats finds in the urn and its beauties? Had you anticipated any such message? What reason has he for saying that beauty is truth?

The student has by this time discovered that there is a perfect unity of thought in the poem, that not only has the poet been consistent in each stanza with the ideas of all the others, but that nowhere have distracting ideas been introduced. The thought marches straight on to the

Studies

conclusion. There is a well-defined plan upon which the poem is constructed. There is besides the unity in form, a unity of style in the several stanzas so that at no time is the reader sensible of jarring discords or unpleasant lines. There is nothing heavy or clumsy in the poem; it is everywhere light and graceful, delicately wrought and highly finished. These characteristics give the poem that formal unity without which no composition can lay claim to first rank. The production still possesses an indefinable something that binds its every element together, that gives form and being to it all and makes us sensible that the ode is a whole, complete and unalterable, with as distinct a personality, as perfect a form, as the urn whose beauty is celebrated. We would resent any modification as violently as we would condemn the vandal who scratched the pictures on the urn or chipped its graceful sides.

This organic oneness is the mark of the poet's genius, not difficult to obtain in a short poem; but to harmonize the thousand elements that enter into a *Hamlet* or mingle in the intricacies of a *Paradise Lost* is a power to which we yield reverential awe. This is the first of the great literary powers, the one which lies at the foundation of all, the one without which no poet ever climbed the hill of fame, no novelist ever charmed the multitude. It is the power whose presence we know only by inference but whose absence is unmistakable.

Unity in a Narrative

In the narrative it is most difficult to preserve an organic unity and many notable failures still mark the field of fiction. Study *The Cricket on the Hearth* to ascertain whether Dickens has mastered his art and possesses the power to make a unit of the composition. Is there a unity of thought in the story, a unity of plot? Write the plot in as few words as possible. Are there incidents that do not contribute to the development of the plot or that distract the reader's attention? Are unnecessary characters introduced and do they draw away your interest from the central personages? What is the function of the Cricket? Why are the Cricket and the Kettle prominent? Do they contribute anything helpful to the atmosphere of the story? Do you think Dickens was conscious of the final outcome as he began the story or did he wander as fancy dictated? Did you feel confident of the innocence of the young wife or were you led to suspect her? Did any doubts you may have had interfere with the unity of the story? Is the style the same throughout? Is it ever broadly humorous? Is it playfully good natured and confidential? In the passages where John is so deeply moved does the style change? Do you find prose that can be scanned? Are

Unity

there rhymes in the prose? Why does Dickens so write of the Cricket and the Kettle? When the style varies does it grate on your sensibilities? Do you ever feel that Dickens is playful where he should be serious, laughing where he should weep? Finally is *The Cricket on the Hearth* a unit, a something complete, whole, perfect by itself, like some beautiful little building whose harmonious parts give you a keen sense of artistic beauty?

The Cricket on the Hearth

CHARLES DICKENS

The Cricket on the Hearth

CHIRP THE FIRST

The Kettle began it ! Don't tell me what Mrs. Peerybingle said. I know better. Mrs. Peerybingle may leave it on record to the end of time that she couldn't say which of them began it; but, I say the Kettle did. I ought to know, I hope ! The Kettle began it, full five minutes by the little waxy-faced Dutch clock in the corner, before the Cricket uttered a chirp.

As if the clock hadn't finished striking, and the convulsive little Haymaker at the top of it, jerking away right and left with the scythe in front of a Moorish Palace, hadn't mowed down half an acre of imaginary grass before the Cricket joined in at all !

Why, I am not naturally positive. Every one knows that. I wouldn't set my own opinion against the opinion of Mrs. Peerybingle, unless I were quite sure, on any account whatever. Nothing should induce me. But, this is a question of fact. And the fact is, that the Kettle began it, at least five minutes before the Cricket gave any sign of

The Cricket on the Hearth

being in existence. Contradict me, and I'll say ten.

Let me narrate exactly how it happened. I should have proceeded to do so in my very first word, but for this plain consideration—if I am to tell a story I must begin at the beginning; and how is it possible to begin at the beginning, without beginning at the Kettle?

It appeared as if it were a sort of match, or trial of skill, you must understand, between the Kettle and the Cricket. And this is what led to it, and how it came about.

Mrs. Peerybingle, going out into the raw twilight, and clicking over the wet stones in a pair of pattens that worked innumerable rough impressions of the first proposition in Euclid¹ all about the yard—Mrs. Peerybingle filled the Kettle at the water-butt. Presently returning, less the pattens (and a good deal less, for they were tall and Mrs. Peerybingle was but short), she set the Kettle on the fire. In doing which she lost her temper, or mislaid it for an instant; for the water being uncomfortably cold, and in that slippery, slushy, sleety sort of state wherein it seems to penetrate

1. In Euclid's geometry the first proposition was, To construct an equilateral triangle upon a given straight line.

The Cricket on the Hearth

through every kind of substance, patten rings included—had laid hold of Mrs. Peerybingle's toes, and even splashed her legs. And when we rather plume ourselves (with reason to) upon our legs, and keep ourselves particularly neat in point of stockings, we find this, for the moment, hard to bear.

Besides, the Kettle was aggravating and obstinate. It wouldn't allow itself to be adjusted on the top bar; it wouldn't hear of accommodating itself kindly to the knobs of coal; it *would* lean forward with a drunken air, and dribble, a very idiot of a Kettle, on the hearth. It was quarrelsome, and hissed and spluttered morosely at the fire. To sum up all, the lid, resisting Mrs. Peerybingle's fingers, first of all turned topsy-turvy, and then, with a ingenious pertinacity deserving of a better cause, dived sideways in—down to the very bottom of the Kettle. And the hull of the Royal George has never made half the monstrous resistance to coming out of the water, which the lid of that Kettle employed against Mrs. Peerybingle, before she got it up again.

It looked sullen and pig-headed enough, even then; carrying its handle with an air of

The Cricket on the Hearth

defiance, and cocking its spout pertly and mockingly at Mrs. Peerybingle, as if it said, "I won't boil. Nothing shall induce me!"

But Mrs. Peerybingle, with restored good humor, dusted her chubby little hands against each other, and sat down before the Kettle, laughing. Meantime, the jolly blaze uprose and fell, flashing and gleaming on the little Haymaker at the top of the Dutch clock, until one might have thought he stood stock still before the Moorish Palace, and nothing was in motion but the flame.

He was on the move, however; and had his spasms, two to the second, all right and regular. But his sufferings when the clock was going to strike, were frightful to behold; and when a Cuckoo looked out of a trap-door in the Palace, and gave note six times, it shook him, each time, like a spectral voice—or like a something wiry, plucking at his legs.

It was not until a violent commotion and a whirring noise among the weights and ropes below him had quite subsided, that this terrified Haymaker became himself again. Nor was he startled without reason; for these rattling, bony skeletons of clocks are very disconcerting in their operation, and I wonder

The Cricket on the Hearth

very much how any set of men, but most of all how Dutchmen, can have had a liking to invent them. For there is a popular belief that Dutchmen love broad cases² and much clothing for their own lower selves; and they might know better than to leave their clocks so very lank and unprotected, surely.

Now it was, you observe, that the Kettle began to spend the evening. Now it was, that the Kettle, growing mellow and musical, began to have irrepressible gurglings in its throat, and to indulge in short vocal snorts, which it checked in the bud, as if it hadn't quite made up its mind yet, to be good company. Now it was, that after two or three such vain attempts to stifle its convivial sentiments, it threw off all moroseness, all reserve, and burst into a stream of song so cosy and hilarious, as never maudlin nightingale yet formed the least idea of.

So plain, too! Bless you, you might have understood it like a book — better than some books you and I could name, perhaps. With its warm breath gushing forth in a light cloud which merrily and gracefully ascended a few feet, then hung about the chimney-corner as

². Trousers.

The Cricket on the Hearth

its own domestic Heaven, it trolled its song with that strong energy of cheerfulness, that its iron body hummed and stirred upon the fire; and the lid itself, the recently rebellious lid — such is the influence of a bright example — performed a sort of jig, and clattered like a deaf and dumb young cymbal that had never known the use of its twin brother.

That this song of the Kettle's was a song of invitation and welcome to somebody out of doors: to somebody at that moment coming on, towards the snug small home and the crisp fire: there is no doubt whatever. Mrs. Peerybingle knew it, perfectly, as she sat musing before the hearth. It's a dark night, sang the Kettle, and the rotten leaves are lying by the way; and, above, all is mist and darkness, and, below, all is mire and clay; and there's only one relief in all the sad and murky air; and I don't know that it is one, for it's nothing but a glare; of deep and angry crimson, where the sun and wind together set a brand upon the clouds for being guilty of such weather; and the widest open country is a long dull streak of black; and there's hoar-frost on the finger-post, and thaw upon the track; and the ice it isn't water, and the

The Cricket on the Hearth

water isn't free; and you couldn't say that anything is what it ought to be; but he is coming, coming, coming! ——

And here, if you like, the Cricket DID chime in! with a Chirrup, Chirrup, Chirrup of such magnitude, by way of chorus; with a voice so astoundingly disproportionate to its size, as compared with the Kettle; (size! you couldn't see it!) that if it had then and there burst itself like an overcharged gun, if it had fallen a victim on the spot, and chirruped its little body into fifty pieces, it would have seemed a natural and inevitable consequence, for which it had expressly labored.

The Kettle had had the last of its solo performance. It persevered with undiminished ardor; but the Cricket took first fiddle and kept it. Good Heaven, how it chirped! Its shrill, sharp, piercing voice resounded through the house, and seemed to twinkle in the outer darkness like a star. There was an indescribable little trill and tremble in it, at its loudest, which suggested its being carried off its legs, and made to leap again, by its own intense enthusiasm. Yet they went very well together, the Cricket and the Kettle. The burden of the song was still the same; and

The Cricket on the Hearth

louder, louder, louder still, they sang it in their emulation.

The fair little listener; for fair she was, and young—though something of what is called the dumpling shape; but I don't myself object to that—lighted a candle; glanced at the Haymaker on the top of the clock, who was getting in a pretty average crop of minutes; and looked out of the window, where she saw nothing, owing to the darkness, but her own face imaged in the glass. And my opinion is (and so would yours have been), that she might have looked a long way, and seen nothing half so agreeable. When she came back, and sat down in her former seat, the Cricket and the Kettle were still keeping it up, with a perfect fury of competition. The Kettle's weak side clearly being that he didn't know when he was beat.

There was all the excitement of a race about it. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket a mile ahead. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle making play in the distance, like a great top. Chirp, chirp, chirp! Cricket round the corner. Hum, hum, hum—m—m! Kettle sticking to him in his own way; no idea of giving in. Chirp, chirp,

The Cricket on the Hearth

chirp ! Cricket fresher than ever. Hum, hum, hum — m — m ! Kettle slow and steady. Chirp, chirp, chirp ! Cricket going in to finish him. Hum, hum, hum — m — m ! Kettle not to be finished. Until at last they get so jumbled together, in the hurry-scurry, helter-skelter, of the match, that whether the Kettle chirped and the Cricket hummed, or the Cricket chirped and the Kettle hummed, or they both chirped and both hummed, it would have taken a clearer head than yours or mine to have decided with anything like certainty. But, of this there is no doubt: that, the Kettle and the Cricket, at one and the same moment, and by some power of amalgamation best known to themselves, sent, each, his fireside song of comfort streaming into a ray of the candle that shone out through the window, and a long way down the lane. And this light, bursting on a certain person who, on the instant, approached towards it through the gloom, expressed the whole thing to him, literally in a twinkling, and cried, “ Welcome home, old fellow ! Welcome home, my boy ! ”

This end attained, the Kettle, being dead beat, boiled over, and was taken off the fire. Mrs. Peerybingle then went running to the

The Cricket on the Hearth

door, where, what with the wheels of a cart, the tramp of a horse, the voice of a man, the tearing in and out of an excited dog, and the surprising and mysterious appearance of a baby, there was soon the very What's-his-name to pay.

Where the Baby came from, or how Mrs. Peerybingle got hold of it in that flash of time, I don't know. But a live Baby there was, in Mrs. Peerybingle's arms; and a pretty tolerable amount of pride she seemed to have in it, when she was drawn gently to the fire, by a sturdy figure of a man, much taller and much older than herself; who had to stoop a long way down, to kiss her. But she was worth the trouble. Six foot six, with the lumbago, might have done it.

"O goodness, John!" said Mrs. P. "What a state you're in with the weather!"

He was something the worse for it, undeniably. The thick mist hung in clots upon his eyelashes like candied thaw; and between the fog and fire together, there were rainbows in his very whiskers.

"Why, you see, Dot," John made answer, slowly, as he unrolled a shawl from about his throat, and warmed his hands; "it—it an't exactly summer weather. So, no wonder."

The Cricket on the Hearth

"I wish you wouldn't call me Dot, John. I don't like it," said Mrs. Peerybingle, pouting in a way that clearly showed she *did* like it, very much.

"Why, what else are you?" returned John, looking down upon her with a smile, and giving her waist as light a squeeze as his huge hand and arm could give. "A dot and" — here he glanced at the Baby — "a dot and carry — I won't say it, for fear I should spoil it; but I was very near a joke. I don't know as ever I was nearer."

He was often near to something or other very clever, by his own account: this lumbering, slow, honest John; this John so heavy, but so light in spirit; so rough upon the surface, but so gentle at the core; so dull without, so quick within; so stolid, but so good! Oh Mother Nature, give thy children the true poetry of heart that hid itself in this poor Carrier's breast — he was but a Carrier by the way — and we can bear to have them talking prose, and leading lives of prose; and bear to bless thee for their company!

It was pleasant to see Dot, with her little figure, and her baby in her arms: a very doll of a baby: glancing with a coquettish thoughtfulness at the fire, and inclining her delicate lit-

The Cricket on the Hearth

tle head just enough on one side to let it rest in an odd, half-natural, half-affected, wholly nestling and agreeable manner, on the great rugged figure of the Carrier. It was pleasant to see him, with his tender awkwardness, endeavoring to adapt his rude support to her slight need, and make his burly middle-age a leaning-staff not inappropriate to her blooming youth. It was pleasant to observe how Tilly Slowboy, waiting in the background for the baby, took special cognizance (though in her earliest teens) of this grouping; and stood with her mouth and eyes wide open, and her head thrust forward, taking it in as if it were air. Nor was it less agreeable to observe how John the Carrier, reference being made by Dot to the aforesaid baby, checked his hand when on the point of touching the infant, as if he thought he might crack it; and bending down, surveyed it from a safe distance, with a kind of puzzled pride, such as an amiable mastiff might be supposed to show, if he found himself, one day, the father of a young canary.

“An’t he beautiful, John? Don’t he look precious in his sleep?”

“Very precious,” said John. “Very much so. He generally *is* asleep, an’t he?”

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Lor, John! Good gracious no!”

“Oh,” said John, pondering, “I thought his eyes was generally shut. Halloa!”

“Goodness, John, how you startle one!”

“It an’t right for him to turn ’em up in that way!” said the astonished Carrier, “is it? See how he’s winking with both of ’em at once! and look at his mouth! why, he’s gasping like a gold and silver fish!”

“You don’t deserve to be a father, you don’t,” said Dot, with all the dignity of an experienced matron. “But how should you know what little complaints children are troubled with, John? You wouldn’t so much as know their names, you stupid fellow.” And when she had turned the Baby over on her left arm, and had slapped its back as a restorative, she pinched her husband’s ear, laughing.

“No,” said John, pulling off his outer coat. “It’s very true, Dot. I don’t know much about it. I only know that I’ve been fighting pretty stiffly with the wind to-night. It’s been blowing north-east, straight into the cart, the whole way home.”

“Poor old man, so it has!” cried Mrs. Peerybingle, instantly becoming very active.

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Here! take the precious darling, Tilly, while I make myself of some use. Bless it, I could smother it with kissing it; I could! Hie then, good dog! Hie Boxer, boy! Only let me make the tea first, John; and then I’ll help you with the parcels, like a busy bee. ‘How doth the little’—and all the rest of it, you know, John. Did you ever learn ‘How doth the little,’ when you went to school, John?”

“Not to quite know it,” John returned. “I was very near it once. But I should only have spoilt it, I dare say.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Dot. She had the blithest little laugh you ever heard. “What a dear old darling of a dunce you are, John, to be sure!”

Not at all disputing this position, John went out to see that the boy with the lantern, which had been dancing to and fro before the door and window, like a Will of the Wisp, took due care of the horse; who was fatter than you would quite believe, if I gave you his measure, and so old that his birthday was lost in the mists of antiquity. Boxer, feeling that his attentions were due to the family in general, and must be impartially distributed, dashed in and out with bewildering inconstancy: now

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describing a circle of short barks round the horse, where he was being rubbed down at the stable-door; now feigning to make savage rushes at his mistress, and facetiously bringing himself to sudden stops; now eliciting a shriek from Tilly Slowboy, in the low nursing-chair near the fire, by the unexpected application of his moist nose to her countenance; now exhibiting an obtrusive interest in the Baby; now going round and round upon the hearth, and lying down as if he had established himself for the night; now getting up again, and taking that nothing of a fag-end of a tail of his, out into the weather, as if he had just remembered an appointment, and was off, at a round trot, to keep it.

“There! There’s the teapot, ready on the hob!” said Dot; as briskly busy as a child at play at keeping house. “And there’s the cold knuckle of ham; and there’s the butter; and there’s the crusty loaf, and all! Here’s a clothes-basket for the small parcels, John, if you’ve got any there — where are you, John? Don’t let the dear child fall under the grate, Tilly, whatever you do!”

It may be noted of Miss Slowboy, in spite of her rejecting the caution with some vivacity,

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that she had a rare and surprising talent for getting this Baby into difficulties: and had several times imperilled its short life, in a quiet way peculiarly her own. She was of a spare and straight shape, this young lady, insomuch that her garments appeared to be in constant danger of sliding off those sharp pegs, her shoulders, on which they were loosely hung. Her costume was remarkable for the partial development on all possible occasions of some flannel vestment of a singular structure; also for affording glimpses, in the region of the back, of a corset, or pair of stays, in color a dead-green. Being always in a state of gaping admiration at everything, and absorbed, besides, in the perpetual contemplation of her mistress's perfections, and the Baby's, Miss Slowboy, in her little errors of judgment, may be said to have done equal honor to her head and to her heart; and though these did less honor to the Baby's head, which they were the occasional means of bringing into contact with deal doors, dressers, stair-rails, bedposts, and other foreign substances, still they were the honest results of Tilly Slowboy's constant astonishment at finding herself so kindly treated, and installed in such a comfortable

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home. For the maternal and paternal Slow-boy were alike unknown to Fame, and Tilly had been bred by public charity, a Foundling; which word, though only differing from Fondling by one vowel's length, is very different in meaning, and expresses quite another thing.

To have seen little Mrs. Peerybingle come back with her husband; tugging at the clothes-basket, and making the most strenuous exertions to do nothing at all (for he carried it); would have amused you, almost as much as it amused him. It may have entertained the Cricket too, for anything I know; but, certainly, it now began to chirp again, vehemently.

"Heyday!" said John, in his slow way. "It's merrier than ever, to-night, I think."

"And it's sure to bring us good fortune, John! It always has done so. To have a Cricket on the Hearth, is the luckiest thing in all the world!"

John looked at her as if he had very nearly got the thought into his head, that she was his Cricket in chief, and he quite agreed with her. But it was probably one of his narrow escapes, for he said nothing.

"The first time I heard its cheerful little

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note, John, was on that night when you brought me home — when you brought me to my new home here; its little mistress. Nearly a year ago. You recollect, John?"

Oh yes. John remembered. I should think so!

"Its chirp was such a welcome to me! It seemed so full of promise and encouragement. It seemed to say, you would be kind and gentle with me, and would not expect (I had a fear of that, John, then) to find an old head on the shoulders of your foolish little wife."

John thoughtfully patted one of the shoulders, and then the head, as though he would have said No, No; he had had no such expectation; he had been quite content to take them as they were. And really he had reason. They were very comely.

"It spoke the truth, John, when it seemed to say so: for you have ever been, I am sure, the best, the most considerate, the most affectionate of husbands to me. This has been a happy home, John; and I love the Cricket for its sake!"

"Why, so do I then," said the Carrier.
"So do I, Dot."

"I love it for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music

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has given me. Sometimes, in the twilight, when I have felt a little solitary and down-hearted, John — before Baby was here, to keep me company and make the house gay; when I have thought how lonely you would be if I should die; how lonely I should be, if I could know that you had lost me, dear; its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp, upon the hearth, has seemed to tell of another little voice, so sweet, so very dear to me, before whose coming sound my trouble vanished like a dream. And when I used to fear — I did fear once, John; I was very young you know — that ours might prove to be an ill-assorted marriage: I being such a child, and you more like my guardian than my husband: and that you might not, however hard you tried, be able to learn to love me, as you hoped and prayed you might; its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp, has cheered me up again, and filled me with new trust and confidence. I was thinking of these things to-night, dear, when I sat expecting you; and I love the Cricket for their sake!”

“And so do I,” repeated John. “But Dot? I hope and pray that I might learn to love you? How you talk! I had learnt that, long before I brought you here, to be the Cricket’s little mistress, Dot!”

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She laid her hand, an instant, on his arm, and looked up at him with an agitated face, as if she would have told him something. Next moment she was down upon her knees before the basket, speaking in a sprightly voice, and busy with the parcels.

"There are not many of them to-night, John, but I saw some goods behind the cart, just now; and though they give more trouble, perhaps, still they pay as well; so we have no reason to grumble, have we? Besides, you have been delivering, I dare say, as you came along?"

"Oh yes," John said. "A good many."

"Why, what's this round box? Heart alive, John, it's a wedding-cake!"

"Leave a woman alone, to find out that," said John admiringly. "Now a man would never have thought of it. Whereas, it's my belief that if you was to pack a wedding-cake up in a tea-chest, or a turn-up bedstead, or a pickled salmon keg, or any unlikely thing, a woman would be sure to find it out directly. Yes; I called for it at the pastry-cook's."

"And it weighs I don't know what — whole hundred-weights!" cried Dot, making a great demonstration of trying to lift it. "Whose is it, John? Where is it going?"

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“Read the writing on the other side,” said John.

“Why, John! My goodness, John!”

“Ah! Who’d have thought it?” John returned.

“You never mean to say,” pursued Dot, sitting on the floor, and shaking her head at him, “that it’s Gruff and Tackleton the toymaker!”

John nodded.

Mrs. Peerybingle nodded also, fifty times at least. Not in assent—in dumb and pitying amazement; screwing up her lips the while with all their little force (they were never made for screwing up; I am clear of that), and looking the good Carrier through and through, in her abstraction. Miss Slowboy, in the meantime, who had a mechanical power of reproducing scraps of current conversation for the delectation of the baby, with all the sense struck out of them, and all the nouns changed into the plural number, inquired aloud of that young creature, Was it Gruffs and Tackletons the toymakers then, and Would it call at Pastry-cooks for wedding-cakes, and Did its mothers know the boxes when its fathers brought them homes; and so on.

“And that is really to come about!” said

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Dot. "Why, she and I were girls at school together, John."

He might have been thinking of her, or nearly thinking of her, perhaps, as she was in that same school time. He looked upon her with a thoughtful pleasure, but he made no answer.

"And he's as old ! As unlike her !"—Why, how many years older than you, is Gruff and Tackleton, John ?"

"How many more cups of tea shall I drink to-night at one sitting, than Gruff and Tackleton ever took in four, I wonder !" replied John, good-humoredly, as he drew a chair to the round table, and began at the cold ham. "As to eating, I eat but little; but, that little I enjoy, Dot."

Even this, his usual sentiment at meal times, one of his innocent delusions (for his appetite was always obstinate, and flatly contradicted him), awoke no smile in the face of his little wife, who stood among the parcels, pushing the cake-box slowly from her with her foot, and never once looked, though her eyes were cast down too, upon the dainty shoe she generally was so mindful of. Absorbed in thought, she stood there, heedless alike of

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the tea and John (although he called to her, and rapped the table with his knife to startle her), until he rose and touched her on the arm; when she looked at him for a moment, and hurried to her place behind the tea-board, laughing at her negligence. But not as she had laughed before. The manner and the music were quite changed.

“So, these are all the parcels, are they, John?” she said, breaking a long silence, which the honest Carrier had devoted to the practical illustration of one part of his favorite sentiment—certainly enjoying what he ate, if it couldn’t be admitted that he ate but little. “So these are all the parcels, are they, John?”

“That’s all,” said John. “Why—no—I”—laying down his knife and fork, and taking a long breath. “I declare—I’ve clean forgotten the old gentleman!”

“The old gentleman?”

“In the cart,” said John. “He was asleep, among the straw, the last time I saw him. I’ve very nearly remembered him, twice, since I came in; but, he went out of my head again. Holloa! Yahip there! Rouse up! That’s my hearty!”

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John said these latter words outside the door, whither he had hurried with the candle in his hand.

Miss Slowboy, conscious of some mysterious reference to The Old Gentleman, and connecting in her mystified imagination certain associations of a religious nature with the phrase, was so disturbed, that hastily rising from the low chair by the fire to seek protection near the skirts of her mistress, and coming into contact as she crossed the doorway with an ancient Stranger, she instinctively made a charge or butt at him with the only offensive instrument with her reach. This instrument happening to be the baby, great commotion and alarm ensued, which the sagacity of Boxer rather tended to increase; for, that good dog, more thoughtful than its master, had, it seemed, been watching the old gentleman in his sleep, lest he should walk off with a few young poplar trees that were tied up behind the cart; and he still attended on him very closely, worrying his gaiters in fact, and making dead sets at the buttons.

“You’re such an undeniable good sleeper, sir,” said John, when tranquillity was restored;

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in the meantime the old gentleman had stood, bareheaded and motionless, in the centre of the room; "that I have half a mind to ask you where the other six are — only that would be a joke, and I know I should spoil it. Very near though," murmured the Carrier, with a chuckle; "very near!"

The Stranger, who had long white hair, good features, singularly bold and well-defined for an old man, and dark, bright, penetrating eyes, looked round with a smile, and saluted the Carrier's wife by gravely inclining his head.

His garb was very quaint and odd — a long, long way behind the time. Its hue was brown, all over. In his hand he held a great brown club or walking-stick; and striking this upon the floor, it fell asunder, and became a chair. On which he sat down, quite composedly.

"There!" said the Carrier, turning to his wife. "That's the way I found him, sitting by the roadside! Upright as a milestone. And almost as deaf."

"Sitting in the open air, John!"

"In the open air," replied the Carrier, "just at dusk. 'Carriage Paid,' he said; and

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gave me eighteen pence. Then he got in. And there he is."

"He's going, John, I think!"

Not at all. He was only going to speak.

"If you please, I was to be left till called for," said the Stranger, mildly. "Don't mind me."

With that, he took a pair of spectacles from one of his large pockets, and a book from another, and leisurely began to read. Making no more of Boxer than if he had been a house lamb!

The Carrier and his wife exchanged a look of perplexity. The Stranger raised his head; and glancing from the latter to the former, said,

"Your daughter, my good friend?"

"Wife," returned John.

"Niece?" said the Stranger.

"Wife," roared John.

"Indeed?" said the Stranger. "Surely? very young!" He quietly turned over and resumed his reading. But, before he could have read two lines, he again interrupted himself, to say —

"Baby, yours?"

John gave him a gigantic nod; equivalent

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to an answer in the affirmative, delivered through a speaking trumpet.

“Girl?”

“Bo-o-oy!” roared John.

“Also very young, eh?”

Mrs. Peerybingle instantly struck in. “Two months and three da-ays! Vaccinated just six weeks ago-o! Took very fine-ly! Considered, by the doctor, a remarkably beautiful chi-ild! Equal to the general run of children at five months o-old! Takes notice, in a way quite won-der-ful! May seem impossible to you, but feels his legs al-ready!”

Here the breathless little mother, who had been shrieking these short sentences into the old man’s ear, until her pretty face was crimsoned, held up the baby before him as a stubborn and triumphant fact; while Tilly Slowboy, with a melodious cry of Ketcher, Ketcher—which sounded like some unknown words, adapted to a popular sneeze—performed some cow-like gambols round that all unconscious Innocent.

“Hark! He’s called for sure enough,” said John. “There’s somebody at the door. Open it, Tilly.”

Before she could reach it, however, it was

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opened from without; being a primitive sort of door, with a latch that any one could lift if he chose—and a good many people did choose, for all kinds of neighbors liked to have a cheerful word or two with the Carrier, though he was no great talker himself. Being opened, it gave admission to a little, meagre, thoughtful, dingy-faced man, who seemed to have made himself a great-coat from the sack-cloth covering of some old box; for, when he turned to shut the door, and keep the weather out, he disclosed upon the back of that garment, the inscription G & T in large black capitals. Also the word GLASS in bold characters.

“Good-evening John!” said the little man.
“Good-evening Mum. Good-evening Tilly. Good-evening Unbeknown! How’s Baby Mum? Boxer’s pretty well I hope?”

“All thriving, Caleb,” replied Dot. “I am sure you need only look at the dear child, for one, to know that.”

“And I’m sure I need only look at you for another,” said Caleb.

He didn’t look at her though; for he had a wandering and thoughtful eye which seemed to be always projecting itself into some other

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time and place, no matter what he said; a description which will equally apply to his voice.

“Or at John for another,” said Caleb.

“Or at Tilly, as far as that goes. Or certainly at Boxer.”

“Busy just now, Caleb?” asked the Carrier.

“Why, pretty well, John,” he returned, with the distraught air of a man who was casting about for the Philosopher’s stone, at least. “Pretty much so. There’s rather a run on Noah’s Arks at present. I could have wished to improve upon the Family, but I don’t see how it’s to be done at the price. It would be a satisfaction to one’s mind, to make it clearer which was Shems and Hams, and which was Wives. Flies an’t on that scale neither, as compared with elephants, you know! Ah! well! Have you got anything in the parcel line for me, John?”

The Carrier put his hand into a pocket of the coat he had taken off; and brought out carefully preserved in moss and paper, a tiny flower-pot. “There it is!” he said, adjusting it with great care. “Not so much as a leaf damaged. Full of Buds!”

Caleb’s dull eye brightened, as he took it, and thanked him.

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“Dear, Caleb,” said the Carrier. “Very dear at this season.”

“Never mind that. It would be cheap to me, whatever it cost,” returned the little man.

“Anything else, John?”

“A small box,” replied the Carrier. “Here you are!”

“‘For Caleb Plummer,’” said the little man, spelling out the direction, “‘With Cash.’ With Cash, John? I don’t think it’s for me.”

“With Care,” returned the Carrier, looking over his shoulder. “Where do you make out cash?”

“Oh! to be sure!” said Caleb. “It’s all right. With care! Yes, yes; that’s mine. It might have been with cash, indeed, if my dear Boy in the Golden South Americas had lived, John. You loved him like a son; didn’t you? You needn’t say you did. I know, of course. ‘Caleb Plummer. With care.’ Yes, yes, it’s all right. It’s a box of dolls’ eyes for my daughter’s work. I wish it was her own sight in a box, John.”

“I wish it was, or could be!” cried the Carrier.

“Thankee,” said the little man. “You speak very hearty. To think that she should

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never see the Dolls, and them a staring at her, so bold, all day long! That's where it cuts. What's the damage, John?"

"I'll damage you," said John, "if you inquire. Dot! Very near?"

"Well! it's like you to say so," observed the little man. "It's your kind way. Let me see. I think that's all."

"I think not," said the Carrier. "Try again."

"Something for our Governor, eh?" said Caleb, after pondering a little while. "To be sure. That's what I came for; but my head's so running on them Arks and things! He hasn't been here, has he?"

"Not he," returned the Carrier. "He's too busy courting."

"He's coming round though," said Caleb; "for he told me to keep on the near side of the road going home, and it was ten to one he'd take me up. I had better go, by-the-by. — You couldn't have the goodness to let me pinch Boxer's tail, Mum, for half a moment, could you?"

"Why, Caleb! what a question!"

"Oh, never mind, Mum," said the little man. "He mightn't like it perhaps. There's

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a small order just come in for barking dogs; and I should wish to go as close to Natur' as I could, for sixpence. That's all. Never mind, Mum."

It happened opportunely, that Boxer, without receiving the proposed stimulus, began to bark with great zeal. But as this implied the approach of some new visitor, Caleb, postponing his study from the life to a more convenient season, shouldered the round box, and took a hurried leave. He might have spared himself the trouble, for he met the visitor upon the threshold.

"Oh! you are here, are you? Wait a bit. I'll take you home. John Peerybingle, my service to you. More of my service to your pretty wife. Handsomer every day! Better too, if possible! and younger," mused the speaker, in a low voice; "that's the Devil of it."

"I should be astonished at your paying compliments, Mr. Tackleton," said Dot, not with the best grace in the world; "but for your condition."

"You know all about it then?"

"I have got myself to believe it, somehow," said Dot.

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“After a hard struggle, I suppose?”

“Very.”

Tackleton the Toy-merchant, pretty generally known as Gruff and Tackleton — for that was the firm, though Gruff had been bought out long ago; only leaving his name, and as some said his nature, according to its Dictionary meaning, in the business — Tackleton the Toy-merchant was a man whose vocation had been quite misunderstood by his Parents and Guardians. If they had made him a Money-Lender, or a sharp Attorney, or a Sheriff's Officer, or a Broker, he might have sown his discontented oats in his youth, and after having had the full-run of himself in ill-natured transactions, might have turned out amiable, at last, for the sake of a little freshness and novelty. But, cramped and chafing in the peaceable pursuit of toy making, he was a domestic Ogre, who had been living on children all his life, and was their implacable enemy. He despised all toys; wouldn't have bought one for the world; delighted, in his malice, to insinuate grim expressions into the faces of brown paper farmers who drove pigs to market, bellmen who advertised lost lawyers' consciences, movable old ladies who darned stock-

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ings or carved pies; and other like samples of his stock in trade. In appalling masks; hideous, hairy, red-eyed Jacks in Boxes; Vampire Kites; demoniacal Tumblers who wouldn't lie down and were perpetually flying forward, to stare infants out of countenance; his soul revelled. They were his only relief, and safety-valve. He was great in such inventions. Anything suggestive of a Pony-nightmare, was delicious to him. He had even lost money (and he took to that toy very kindly) by getting up Goblin slides for magic-lanterns, whereon the Powers of Darkness were depicted as a sort of supernatural shellfish, with human faces. In intensifying the portraiture of Giants, he had sunk quite a little capital; and, though no painter himself, he could indicate, for the instruction of his artists, with a piece of chalk, a certain furtive leer for the countenances of those monsters, which was safe to destroy the peace of mind of any young gentleman between the ages of six and eleven, for the whole Christmas or Midsummer Vacation.

What he was in toys, he was (as most men are) in other things. You may easily suppose, therefore, that within the great green cape,

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which reached down to the calves of his legs, there was buttoned up to the chin an uncommonly pleasant fellow; and that he was about as choice a spirit, and as agreeable a companion, as ever stood in a pair of bull-headed looking boots with mahogany-colored tops.

Still, Tackleton, the toy-merchant, was going to be married. In spite of all this, he was going to be married. And to a young wife too, a beautiful young wife.

He didn't look much like a bridegroom, as he stood in the Carrier's kitchen, with a twist in his dry face, and a screw in his body, and his hat jerked over the bridge of his nose, and his hands tucked down into the bottoms of his pockets, and his whole sarcastic ill-conditioned self peering out of one little corner of one little eye, like the concentrated essence of any number of ravens. But, a Bridegroom he designed to be.

"In three days' time. Next Thursday. The last day of the first month in the year. That's my wedding-day," said Tackleton.

Did I mention that he had always one eye wide open, and one eye nearly shut; and that the one eye nearly shut, was always the expressive eye? I don't think I did.

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"That's my wedding-day!" said Tackleton, rattling his money.

"Why, it's our wedding-day too," exclaimed the Carrier.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tackleton. "Odd! You're just such another couple. Just!"

The indignation of Dot at this presumptuous assertion is not to be described. What next? His imagination would compass the possibility of just such another Baby, perhaps. The man was mad.

"I say! A word with you," murmured Tackleton, nudging the Carrier with his elbow, and taking him a little apart. "You'll come to the wedding? We're in the same boat, you know."

"How in the same boat?" inquired the Carrier.

"A little disparity, you know!" said Tackleton, with another nudge. "Come and spend an evening with us, beforehand."

"Why?" demanded John, astonished at this pressing hospitality.

"Why?" returned the other. "That's a new way of receiving an invitation. Why, for pleasure; sociability, you know, and all that!"

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"I thought you were never sociable," said John in his plain way.

"Tchah! It's no use to be anything but free with you I see," said Tackleton. "Why, then, the truth is, you have a — what tea-drinking people call a sort of a comfortable appearance together: you and your wife. We know better, you know, but" —

"No, we don't know better," interposed John. "What are you talking about?"

"Well! We *don't* know better, then," said Tackleton. "We'll agree that we don't. As you like; what does it matter? I was going to say, as you have that sort of appearance, your company will produce a favorable effect on Mrs. Tackleton that will be. And though I don't think your good lady's very friendly to me, in this matter, still she can't help herself from falling into my views, for there's a compactness and coziness of appearance about her that always tells, even in an indifferent case. You'll say you'll come?"

"We have arranged to keep our Wedding-Day (as far as that goes) at home," said John. "We have made the promise to ourselves these six months. We think, you see, that home" —

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“Bah! what’s home?” said Tackleton.
“Four walls and a ceiling! (why don’t you kill that Cricket? I would! I always do. I hate their noise.) There are four walls and a ceiling at my house. Come to me!”

“You kill your Crickets, eh?” said John.

“Scrunch ’em, Sir,” returned the other, setting his heel heavily on the floor. “You’ll say you’ll come? It’s as much your interest as mine, you know, that the women should persuade each other that they’re quiet and contented, and couldn’t be better off. I know their way. Whatever a woman says, another woman is determined to clinch, always. There’s that spirit of emulation among ’em, Sir, that if your wife says to my wife, ‘I’m the happiest woman in the world, and mine’s the best husband in the world, and I dote on him,’ my wife will say the same to yours, or more, and half believe it.”

“Do you mean to say she don’t, then?” asked the Carrier.

“Don’t!” cried Tackleton, with a short, sharp laugh. “Don’t what?”

The Carrier had had some faint idea of adding, “dote upon you.”

But, happening to meet the half-closed eye,

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as it twinkled upon him over the turned up collar of the cape, which was within an ace of poking it out, he felt it such an unlikely part and parcel of anything to be doted on, that he substituted, "that she don't believe it?"

"Ah you dog! You're joking," said Tackleton.

But the Carrier, though slow to understand the full drift of his meaning, eyed him in such a serious manner, that he was obliged to be a little more explanatory.

"I have the humor," said Tackleton: holding up the fingers of his left hand, and tapping the forefinger, to imply "there I am, Tackleton to wit:" "I have the humor, Sir, to marry a young wife and a pretty wife:" here he rapped his little finger, to express the Bride; not sparingly, but sharply; with a sense of power. "I'm able to gratify that humor and I do. It's my whim. But—now look there."

He pointed to where Dot was sitting, thoughtfully, before the fire; leaning her dimpled chin upon her hand, and watching the bright blaze. The Carrier looked at her, and then at him, and then at her, and then at him again.

"She honors and obeys, no doubt, you

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know," said Tackleton; "and that, as I am not a man of sentiment, is quite enough for *me*. But do you think there's anything more in it?"

"I think," observed the Carrier, "that I should chuck any man out of window, who said there wasn't."

"Exactly so," returned the other, with an unusual alacrity of assent. "To be sure! Doubtless you would. Of course. I'm certain of it. Good night. Pleasant dreams!"

The Carrier was puzzled, and made uncomfortable and uncertain, in spite of himself. He couldn't help showing it, in his manner.

"Good night, my dear friend!" said Tackleton, compassionately. "I'm off. We're exactly alike in reality, I see. You won't give us to-morrow evening? Well! next day you go out visiting, I know. I'll meet you there, and bring my wife that is to be. It'll do her good. You're agreeable? Thankee. What's that?"

It was a loud cry from the Carrier's wife; a loud, sharp, sudden cry, that made the room ring, like a glass vessel. She had risen from her seat, and stood like one transfixed by terror and surprise. The Stranger had advanced towards the fire, to warm himself,

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and stood within a short stride of her chair. But quite still.

“Dot!” cried the Carrier. “Mary! Darling! what’s the matter?”

They were all about her in a moment. Caleb, who had been dozing on the cake-box, in the first imperfect recovery of his suspended presence of mind seized Miss Slowboy by the hair of her head; but immediately apologized.

“Mary!” exclaimed the Carrier, supporting her in his arms. “Are you ill? what is it? Tell me, dear!”

She only answered by beating her hands together, and falling into a wild fit of laughter. Then, sinking from his grasp upon the ground, she covered her face with her apron, and wept bitterly. And then, she laughed again; and then, she cried again; and then, she said how cold it was, and suffered him to lead her to the fire, where she sat down as before. The old man standing, as before; quite still.

“I’m better, John,” she said. “I’m quite well now — I” —

John! But John was on the other side of her. Why turn her face towards the strange old gentleman, as if addressing him? Was her brain wandering?

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“Only a fancy, John dear—a kind of shock—a something coming suddenly before my eyes—I don’t know what it was. It’s quite gone; quite gone.”

“I’m glad it’s gone,” muttered Tackleton, turning the expressive eye all around the room. “I wonder where it’s gone, and what it was. Humph! Caleb, come here! Who’s that with the gray hair?”

“I don’t know, Sir,” returned Caleb, in a whisper. “Never see him before, in all my life. A beautiful figure for a nut cracker; quite a new model. With a screw-jaw opening down into his waistcoat, he’d be lovely.”

“Not ugly enough,” said Tackleton.

“Or for a firebox, either,” observed Caleb, in deep contemplation, “what a model! Unscrew his head to put the matches in; turn him heels up’ards for the light; and what a firebox for a gentleman’s mantel-shelf, just as he stands!”

“Not half ugly enough,” said Tackleton. “Nothing in him at all. Come! Bring that box. All right now, I hope?”

“Oh, quite gone! quite gone!” said the little woman, waving him hurriedly away. “Good night!”

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Good night,” said Tackleton. “Good night, John Peerybingle. Take care how you carry that box, Caleb. Let it fall, and I’ll murder you! Dark as pitch, and weather worse than ever, eh? Good-night!”

So, with another sharp look round the room, he went out at the door; followed by Caleb with the wedding-cake on his head.

The Carrier had been so much astounded by his little wife, and so busily engaged in soothing and tending her, that he had scarcely been conscious of the Stranger’s presence, until now, when he again stood there, their only guest.

“He don’t belong to them, you see,” said John. “I must give him a hint to go.”

“I beg your pardon, friend,” said the old gentleman, advancing to him; “the more so, as I fear your wife has not been well; but the Attendant whom my infirmity,” he touched his ears and shook his head, “renders almost indispensable, not having arrived, I fear there must be some mistake. The bad night which made the shelter of your comfortable cart (may I never have a worse!) so acceptable, is still as bad as ever. Would you, in your kindness, suffer me to rent a bed here?”

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Yes, yes,” cried Dot. “Yes! Certainly!”

“Oh!” said the Carrier, surprised by the rapidity of this consent. “Well! I don’t object; but, still I’m not quite sure that —”

“Hush!” she interrupted. “Dear John!”

“Why, he’s stone deaf,” urged John.

“I know he is, but—Yes sir, certainly. Yes! certainly! I’ll make him up a bed, directly, John.”

As she hurried off to do it, the flutter of her spirits, and the agitation of her manner, were so strange, that the Carrier stood looking after her, quite confounded.

“Did its mothers make it up a Bed then!” cried Miss Slowboy to the Baby; “and did its hair grow brown and curly, when its caps was lifted off, and frighten it, a precious Pets, a-sitting by the fires!”

With that unaccountable attraction of the mind to trifles, which is often incidental to a state of doubt and confusion, the Carrier, as he walked slowly to and fro, found himself mentally repeating even these absurd words, many times. So many times that he got them by heart, and was still conning them over and over, like a lesson, when Tilly, after administering as much friction to the little

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bald head with her hand as she thought wholesome (according to the practice of nurses), had once more tied the Baby's cap on.

"And frighten it a precious Pets, a-sitting by the fires. What frightened Dot, I wonder!" mused the Carrier, pacing to and fro.

He scouted, from his heart, the insinuations of the Toy-merchant, and yet they filled him with a vague, indefinite uneasiness. For, Tackleton was quick and sly; and he had that painful sense, himself, of being a man of slow perception, that a broken hint was always worrying to him. He certainly had no intention in his mind of linking anything that Tackleton had said, with the unusual conduct of his wife, but the two subjects of reflection came into his mind together, and he could not keep them asunder.

The bed was soon made ready; and the visitor, declining all refreshment but a cup of tea, retired. Then, Dot—quite well again, she said, quite well again—arranged the great chair in the chimney-corner for her husband; filled his pipe and gave it him; and took her usual little stool beside him on the hearth.

She always *would* sit on that little stool. I think she must have had a kind of notion

The Cricket on the Hearth

that it was a coaxing, wheedling, little stool.

She was, out and out, the very best filler of a pipe, I should say, in the four quarters of the globe. To see her put that chubby little finger in the bowl and then blow down the pipe to clear the tube, and, when she had done so, affect to think that there was really something in the tube, and blow a dozen times, and hold it to her eye like a telescope, with a most provoking twist in her capital little face, as she looked down it, was quite a brilliant thing. As to the tobacco, she was perfect mistress of the subject; and her lighting of the pipe, with a wisp of paper, when the Carrier had it in his mouth—going so very near his nose, and yet not scorching it—was Art, high Art. And the Cricket and the Kettle, turning up again, acknowledged it! The bright fire, blazing again, acknowledged it! The little Mower on the clock, in his unheeded work, acknowledged it! The Carrier, in his smoothing forehead and expanding face, acknowledged it, the readiest of all.

And as he soberly and thoughtfully puffed at his old pipe, and as the Dutch clock ticked, and as the red fire gleamed, and as the Cricket chirped; that Genius of his Hearth and Home

The Cricket on the Hearth

(for such the Cricket was) came out, in fairy shape, into the room, and summoned many forms of Home about him. Dots of all ages, and all sizes, filled the chamber. Dots who were merry children, running on before him gathering flowers, in the fields; coy Dots, half shrinking from, half yielding to, the pleading of his own rough image; newly married Dots alighting at the door, and taking wondering possession of the household keys; motherly little Dots, attended by fictitious Slowboys, bearing babies to be christened; matronly Dots, still young and blooming, watching Dots of daughters, as they danced at rustic balls; fat Dots, encircled and beset by troops of rosy grandchildren; withered Dots, who leant on sticks, and tottered as they crept along. Old Carriers too, appeared, with blind old Boxers lying at their feet; and newer carts with younger drivers ("Peerybingle Brothers" on the tilt); and sick old Carriers, tended by the gentlest hands; and graves of dead and gone old Carriers, green in the churchyard. And as the Cricket showed him all these things—he saw them plainly, though his eyes were fixed upon the fire—the Carrier's heart grew light and happy, and he thanked his

The Cricket on the Hearth

Household Gods with all his might, and cared no more for Gruff and Tackleton than you do.

But what was that young figure of a man, which the same Fairy Cricket set so near Her stool, and which remained there, singly and alone? Why did it linger still, so near her, with its arms upon the chimney-piece, ever repeating "Married! and not to me!"

O Dot! O failing Dot! There is no place for it in all your husband's visions; why has its shadow fallen on his hearth!

The Cricket on the Hearth

CHIRP THE SECOND

Caleb Plummer and his Blind Daughter lived all alone by themselves, as the Story-books say — and my blessing, with yours to back it I hope, on the Storybooks, for saying anything in this workaday world! — Caleb Plummer and his Blind Daughter lived all alone by themselves, in a little cracked nutshell of a wooden house, which was, in truth, no better than a pimple on the prominent red-brick nose of Gruff and Tackleton. The premises of Gruff and Tackleton were the great feature of the street; but you might have knocked down Caleb Plummer's dwelling with a hammer or two, and carried off the pieces in a cart.

If anyone had done the dwelling house of Caleb Plummer the honor to miss it after such an inroad, it would have been, no doubt, to commend its demolition as a vast improvement. It stuck to the premises of Gruff and Tackleton, like a barnacle to a ship's keel, or a snail to a door, or a little bunch of toadstools to the stem of a tree. But it was the germ from which the full-grown trunk of Gruff and

The Cricket on the Hearth

Tackleton had sprung; and under its crazy roof, the Gruff before last, had, in a small way, made toys for a generation of old boys and girls, who had played with them, and found them out, and broken them, and gone to sleep.

I have said that Caleb and his poor Blind Daughter lived here; but I should have said that Caleb lived here, and his poor Blind Daughter somewhere else; in an enchanted home of Caleb's furnishing, where scarcity and shabbiness were not, and trouble never entered. Caleb was no Sorcerer, but in the only magic art that still remains to us; the magic of devoted, and deathless love: Nature had been the mistress of his study; and from her teaching, all the wonder came.

The Blind Girl never knew that ceilings were discolored, walls blotched, and bare of plaster here and there; high crevices unstopped, and widening every day; beams mouldering and tending downward. The Blind Girl never knew that iron was rusting, wood rotting, paper peeling off; the very size, and shape, and true proportion of the dwelling, withering away. The Blind Girl never knew that ugly shapes of delf and earthenware were on the board; that sorrow and faint-

The Cricket on the Hearth

heartedness were in the house; that Caleb's scanty hairs were turning grayer and more gray before her sightless face. The Blind Girl never knew they had a master, cold, exacting, and uninterested: never knew that Tackleton was Tackleton in short; but lived in the belief of an eccentric humorist who loved to have his jest with them; and while he was the Guardian Angel of their lives, disdained to hear one word of thankfulness.

And all was Caleb's doing; all the doing of her simple father! But he too had a Cricket on his Hearth; and listening sadly to its music when the motherless Blind Child was very young, that Spirit had inspired him with the thought that even her great deprivation might be almost changed into a blessing, and the girl made happy by these little means. For all the Cricket tribe are potent Spirits, even though the people who hold converse with them do not know it (which is frequently the case); and there are not in the unseen world, voices more gentle and more true, that may be so implicitly relied on, or that are so certain to give none but tenderest counsel, as the Voices in which the Spirits of the Fireside and the Hearth address themselves to human kind.

The Cricket on the Hearth

Caleb and his daughter were at work together in their usual working-room, which served them for their ordinary living room as well; and a strange place it was. There were houses in it, finished and unfinished, for Dolls of all stations in life. Surburban tenements for Dolls of moderate means; kitchens and single apartments for Dolls of the lower classes; capital town residences for Dolls of high estate. Some of these establishments were already furnished according to estimate, with a view to the convenience of Dolls of limited income; others could be fitted on the most expensive scale, at a moment's notice, from whole shelves of chairs and tables, sofas, bedsteads, and upholstery. The nobility and gentry and public in general, for whose accommodation these tenements were designed, lay, here and there, in baskets, staring straight up at the ceiling; but in denoting their degrees in society, and confining them to their respective stations (which experience shows to be lamentably difficult in real life), the makers of these Dolls had far improved on Nature, who is often froward and perverse; for they, not resting on such arbitrary marks as satin, cotton-print, and bits of rag, had superadded

The Cricket on the Hearth

striking personal differences which allowed of no mistake. Thus, the Doll-lady of Distinction had wax limbs of perfect symmetry; but only she and her compeers; the next grade in the social scale being made of leather; and the next of coarse linen stuff. As to the common people, they had just so many matches out of tinder-boxes for their arms and legs, and there they were — established in their sphere at once, beyond the possibility of getting out of it.

There were various other samples of his handicraft, besides Dolls, in Caleb Plummer's room. There were Noah's Arks, in which the Birds and Beasts were an uncommonly tight fit, I assure you; though they could be crammed in, anyhow, at the roof, and rattled and shaken into the smallest compass. By a bold poetical license, most of these Noah's Arks had knockers on the doors; inconsistent appendages, perhaps, as suggestive of morning callers and a Postman, yet a pleasant finish to the outside of the building. There were scores of melancholy little carts which, when the wheels went round, performed most doleful music. Many small fiddles, drums, and other instruments of torture; no end of

The Cricket on the Hearth

cannon, shields, swords, spears, and guns. There were little tumblers in red breeches, incessantly swarming up high obstacles of red-tape, and coming down, head first, on the other side; and there were innumerable old gentlemen of respectable, not to say venerable, appearance, insanely flying over horizontal pegs, inserted for the purpose, in their own street doors. There were beasts of all sorts: horses, in particular, of every breed, from the spotted barrel on four pegs, with a small tippet for a mane, to the thoroughbred rocker on his highest mettle. As it would have been hard to count the dozens upon dozens of grotesque figures that were ever ready to commit all sorts of absurdities on the turning of a handle, so it would have been no easy task to mention any human folly, vice or weakness, that had not its type, immediate or remote, in Caleb Plummer's room. And not in an exaggerated form, for very little handles will move men and women to as strange performances, as any Toy was ever made to undertake.

In the midst of all these objects, Caleb and his daughter sat at work. The Blind Girl busy as a Doll's dressmaker; Caleb painting

The Cricket on the Hearth

and glazing the four-pair front of a desirable family mansion.

The care imprinted in the lines of Caleb's face, and his absorbed and dreamy manner, which would have sat well on some alchemist or abstruse student, were at first sight an odd contrast to his occupation, and the trivialities about him. But, trivial things, invented and pursued for bread, become very serious matters of fact; and, apart from this consideration, I am not at all prepared to say, myself, that if Caleb had been a Lord Chamberlain, or a member of Parliament, or a lawyer, or even a great speculator, he would have dealt in toys one whit less whimsical, while I have a very great doubt whether they would have been as harmless.

"So you were out in the rain last night, father, in your beautiful new great-coat," said Caleb's daughter.

"In my beautiful new great-coat," answered Caleb, glancing towards a clothes-line in the room, on which the sack-cloth garment previously described, was carefully hung up to dry.

"How glad I am you bought it, father!"

"And of such a tailor, too," said Caleb.

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"Quite a fashionable tailor. It's too good for me."

The Blind Girl rested from her work, and laughed with delight. "Too good, father! What can be too good for you?"

"I'm half ashamed to wear it though," said Caleb, watching the effect of what he said, upon her brightening face; "upon my word! When I hear the boys and people say behind me, 'Hal-loa! Here's a swell!' I don't know which way to look. And when the beggar wouldn't go away last night; and when I said I was a very common man, said 'No, your Honor! Bless your Honor, don't say that!' I was quite ashamed. I really felt as if I hadn't a right to wear it." Happy Blind Girl! How merry she was in her exultation!

"I see you, father," she said, clasping her hands, "as plainly, as if I had the eyes I never want when you are with me. A blue coat"—

"Bright blue," said Caleb.

"Yes, yes! Bright blue!" exclaimed the girl, turning up her radiant face; "the color I can just remember in the blessed sky! You told me it was blue before! A bright blue coat"—

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Made loose to the figure,” suggested Caleb.

“Made loose to the figure!” cried the Blind Girl, laughing heartily; “and in it, you, dear father, with your merry eye, your smiling face, your free step, and your dark hair — looking so young and handsome!”

“Halloa! Halloa!” said Caleb. “I shall be vain, presently!”

“I think you are, already,” cried the Blind Girl, pointing at him, in her glee. “I know you, father! Ha, ha, ha! I’ve found you out, you see!”

How different the picture in her mind, from Caleb, as he sat observing her! She had spoken of his free step. She was right in that. For years and years, he had never once crossed that threshold at his own slow pace, but with a footfall counterfeited for her ear; and never had he, when his heart was heaviest, forgotten the light tread that was to render her so cheerful and courageous!

Heaven knows! But I think Caleb’s vague bewilderment of manner may have half originated in his having confused himself about himself and everything around him, for the love of his Blind Daughter. How could the little

The Cricket on the Hearth

man be otherwise than bewildered, after laboring for so many years to destroy his own identity, and that of all the objects that had any bearing on it !

“ There we are,” said Caleb, falling back a pace or two to form the better judgment of his work; “ as near the real thing as sixpenn’orth of halfpence is to sixpence. What a pity that the whole front of the house opens at once ! If there was only a staircase in it, now, and regular doors to the rooms to go in at ! But that’s the worst of my calling, I’m always deluding myself, and swindling myself.”

“ You are speaking quite softly. You are not tired, father ? ”

“ Tired ! ” echoed Caleb, with a great burst of animation, “ what should tire me, Bertha ? I was never tired. What does it mean ? ”

To give the greater force to his words, he checked himself in an involuntary imitation of two half-length stretching and yawning figures on the mantel-shelf, who were represented as in one eternal state of weariness from the waist upwards; and hummed a fragment of a song. It was a Bacchanalian song, something about a Sparkling Bowl. He sang it with an assumption of a Devil-may-care

The Cricket on the Hearth

voice, that made his face a thousand times more meagre and more thoughtful than ever.

"What! You're singing, are you?" said Tackleton, putting his head in at the door. "Go it! *I* can't sing."

Nobody would have suspected him of it. He hadn't what is generally termed a singing face, by any means.

"I can't afford to sing," said Tackleton. "I'm glad *you* can. I hope you can afford to work too. Hardly time for both, I should think?"

"If you only could see him, Bertha, how he's winking at me!" whispered Caleb. "Such a man to joke! you'd think, if you didn't know him, he was in earnest — wouldn't you now?"

The Blind Girl smiled and nodded.

"The bird that can sing and won't sing, must be made to sing, they say," grumbled Tackleton. "What about the owl that can't sing, and oughtn't to sing, and will sing; is there anything that *he* should be made to do?"

"The extent to which *he's* winking at this moment!" whispered Caleb to his daughter. "O, my gracious!"

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Always merry and light hearted with us!” cried the smiling Bertha.

“O, you’re there, are you?” answered Tackleton. “Poor Idiot!”

He really did believe she was an Idiot; and he founded the belief, I can’t say whether consciously or not, upon her being fond of him.

“Well! and being there,—how are you?” said Tackleton, in his grudging way.

“Oh! well; quite well. And as happy as even you can wish me to be. As happy as you would make the whole world, if you could!”

“Poor Idiot!” muttered Tackleton. “No gleam of reason. Not a gleam!”

The Blind Girl took his hand and kissed it; held it for a moment in her own two hands; and laid her cheek against it tenderly, before releasing it. There was such unspeakable affection and such fervent gratitude in the act, that Tackleton himself was moved to say, in a milder growl than usual:

“What’s the matter now?”

“I stood it close beside my pillow when I went to sleep last night, and remembered it in my dreams. And when the day broke, and

The Cricket on the Hearth

the glorious red sun — the *red* sun, father?"

"Red in the mornings and the evenings, Bertha," said poor Caleb, with a woeful glance at his employer.

"When it rose, and the bright light I almost fear to strike myself against in walking, came into the room, I turned the little tree towards it, and blessed Heaven for making things so precious, and blessed you for sending them to cheer me!"

"Bedlam broke loose!" said Tackleton under his breath. "We shall arrive at the strait-waistcoat and mufflers soon. We're getting on!"

Caleb, with his hands hooked loosely in each other, stared vacantly before him while his daughter spoke, as if he really were uncertain (I believe he was) whether Tackleton had done anything to deserve her thanks, or not. If he could have been a perfectly free agent, at that moment, required, on pain of death, to kick the Toy-merchant, or fall at his feet, according to his merits, I believe it would have been an even chance which course he would have taken. Yet, Caleb knew that with his own hands he had brought the little rose-tree home for her, so carefully, and that

The Cricket on the Hearth

with his own lips he had forged the innocent deception which should help to keep her from suspecting how much, how very much, he every day denied himself, that she might be the happier.

“Bertha!” said Tackleton, assuming, for the nonce, a little cordiality. “Come here.”

“Oh! I can come straight to you! You needn’t guide me!” she rejoined.

“Shall I tell you a secret, Bertha?”

“If you will!” she answered, eagerly.

How bright the darkened face! How adorned with light, the listening head!

“This is the day on which little what’s-her-name, the spoilt child, Peerybingle’s wife, pays her regular visit to you—makes her fantastic Picnic here; an’t it?” said Tackleton, with a strong expression of distaste for the whole concern. “Yes,” replied Bertha, “this is the day.”

“I thought so,” said Tackleton. “I should like to join the party.”

“Do you hear that, father!” cried the Blind Girl in an ecstasy.

“Yes, yes, I hear it,” murmured Caleb, with the fixed look of a sleep-walker; “but I don’t believe it. It’s one of my lies, I’ve no doubt.”

The Cricket on the Hearth

"You see I—I want to bring the Peery-bingles a little more into company with May Fielding," said Tackleton. "I am going to be married to May."

"Married!" cried the Blind Girl, starting from him.

"She's such a con-founded idiot," muttered Tackleton, "that I was afraid she'd never comprehend me. Ah, Bertha! Married! Church, parson, clerk, beadle, glass-coach, bells, breakfast, bride-cake, favors, marrow-bones, cleavers, and all the rest of the tom-foolery. A wedding, you know; a wedding. Don't you know what a wedding is?"

"I know," replied the Blind Girl, in a gentle tone. "I understand!"

"Do you?" muttered Tackleton. "It's more than I expected. Well! on that account I want to join the party, and to bring May and her mother. I'll send in a little something or other, before the afternoon. A cold leg of mutton, or some comfortable trifle of that sort. You'll expect me?"

"Yes," she answered.

She had drooped her head, and turned away: and so stood, with her hands crossed, musing.

The Cricket on the Hearth

"I don't think you will," muttered Tackleton, looking at her; "for you seem to have forgotten all about it already. Caleb!"

"I may venture to say I'm here, I suppose," thought Caleb. "Sir!"

"Take care she don't forget what I've been saying to her."

"*She* never forgets," returned Caleb. "It's one of the few things she an't clever in."

"Every man thinks his own geese swans," observed the Toy-merchant, with a shrug. "Poor devil!" Having delivered himself of which remark, with infinite contempt, old Gruff and Tackleton withdrew.

Bertha remained where he had left her, lost in meditation. The gayety had vanished from her downcast face, and it was very sad. Three or four times, she shook her head, as if bewailing some remembrance or some loss; but her sorrowful reflections found no vent in words.

It was not until Caleb had been occupied, some time, in yoking a team of horses to a wagon by the summary process of nailing the harness to the vital parts of their bodies, that she drew near to his working-stool, and sitting down beside him, said:

The Cricket on the Hearth

"Father, I am lonely in the dark. I want my eyes, my patient, willing eyes."

"Here they are," said Caleb. "Always ready. They are more yours than mine, Bertha, any hour in the four-and-twenty. What shall your eyes do for you, dear?"

"Look round the room, father."

"All right," said Caleb. "No sooner said than done, Bertha."

"Tell me about it."

"It's much the same as usual," said Caleb. "Homely, but very snug. The gay colors on the walls; the bright flowers on the plates and dishes; the shining wood, where there are beams or panels; the general cheerfulness and neatness of the building; make it very pretty."

Cheerful and neat it was wherever Bertha's hands could busy themselves. But nowhere else, were cheerfulness and neatness possible, in the old crazy shed which Caleb's fancy so transformed.

"You have your working dress on, and are not so gallant as when you wear the handsome coat?" said Bertha, touching him.

"Not quite so gallant," answered Caleb. "Pretty brisk though."

"Father," said the Blind Girl, drawing

The Cricket on the Hearth

close to his side, and stealing one arm round his neck. "Tell me something about May. She is very fair?"

"She is indeed," said Caleb. And she was indeed. It was quite a rare thing to Caleb, not to have to draw on his invention.

"Her hair is dark," said Bertha pensively, "darker than mine. Her voice is sweet and musical, I know. I have often loved to hear it. Her shape"—

"There's not a Doll's in all the room to equal it," said Caleb. "And her eyes!"

He stopped; for Bertha had drawn closer round his neck; and, from the arm that clung about him, came a warning pressure which he understood too well.

He coughed a moment, hammered for a moment, and then fell back upon the song about the Sparkling Bowl; his infallible resource in all such difficulties.

"Our friend, father; our benefactor. I am never tired you know of hearing about him.—Now was I, ever?" she said hastily.

"Of course not," answered Caleb. "And with reason."

"Ah! With how much reason!" cried the Blind Girl. With such fervency, that Caleb,

The Cricket on the Hearth

though his motives were so pure, could not endure to meet her face; but dropped his eyes, as if she could have read in them his innocent deceit.

“Then, tell me again about him, dear father,” said Bertha. “Many times again! His face is benevolent, kind, and tender. Honest and true, I am sure it is. The manly heart that tries to cloak all favors with a show of roughness and unwillingness, beats in its every look and glance.” “And makes it noble,” added Caleb, in his quiet desperation.

“And makes it noble!” cried the Blind Girl. “He is older than May, father.”

“Ye-es,” said Caleb, reluctantly. “He’s a little older than May. But that don’t signify.”

“Oh father, yes! To be his patient companion in infirmity and age; to be his gentle nurse in sickness, and his constant friend in suffering and sorrow; to know no weariness in working for his sake; to watch him, tend him, sit beside his bed and talk to him awake, and pray for him asleep; what privileges these would be! What opportunities for proving all her truth and devotion to him! Would she do all this, dear father?”

The Cricket on the Hearth

“No doubt of it,” said Caleb.

“I love her, father; I can love her from my soul!” exclaimed the Blind Girl. And saying so, she laid her poor blind face on Caleb’s shoulder, and so wept and wept, that he was almost sorry to have brought that tearful happiness upon her.

In the meantime there had been a pretty sharp commotion at John Peerybingle’s; for little Mrs. Peerybingle naturally couldn’t think of going anywhere without the Baby; and to get the Baby under weigh, took time. Not that there was much of the Baby: speaking of it as a thing of weight and measure: but there was a vast deal to do about it, and it all had to be done by easy stages. For instance: when the Baby was got, by hook and by crook, to a certain point of dressing, and you might have rationally supposed that another touch or two would finish him off, and turn him out a tip-top Baby, challenging the world, he was unexpectedly extinguished in a flannel cap, and hustled off to bed; where he simmered (so to speak) between two blankets for the best part of an hour. From this state of inaction he was then recalled, shining very much and roaring violently, to partake of —

The Cricket on the Bearth

well! I would rather say, if you'll permit me to speak generally—of a slight repast. After which, he went to sleep again. Mrs. Peerybingle took advantage of this interval, to make herself as smart in a small way as ever you saw anybody in all your life; and during the same short truce, Miss Slowboy insinuated herself into a spencer¹ of a fashion so surprising and ingenious, that it had no connection with herself or anything else in the universe, but was a shrunken, dog's-eared, independent fact, pursuing its lonely course without the least regard to anybody. By this time, the Baby, being all alive again, was invested, by the united efforts of Mrs. Peerybingle and Miss Slowboy, with a cream-colored mantle for its body, and a sort of nankeen raised-pie for its head; and so in course of time they all three got down to the door, where the old horse had already taken more than the full value of his day's toll out of the Turnpike Trust, by tearing up the road with his impatient autographs—and whence Boxer might be dimly seen in the remote perspective, standing looking back, and tempting him to come on without orders.

1. An outside garment worn by either sex. Lord Spencer brought it into fashion.

The Cricket on the Hearth

As to a chair, or anything of that kind for helping Mrs. Peerybingle into the cart, you know very little of John, I flatter myself, if you think *that* was necessary. Before you could have seen him lift her from the ground, there she was in her place, fresh and rosy, saying, "John! How can you! Think of Tilly!"

If I might be allowed to mention a young lady's legs, on any terms, I would observe of Miss Slowboy's that there was a fatality about them which rendered them singularly liable to be grazed; and that she never effected the smallest ascent or descent, without recording the circumstance upon them with a notch, as Robinson Crusoe marked the days upon his wooden calendar. But as this might be considered ungentleel, I'll think of it.

"John? You've got the basket with the Veal and Ham-Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer?" said Dot. "If you haven't, you must turn round again, this very minute."

"You're a nice little article," returned the Carrier, "to be talking about turning round, after keeping me a full quarter of an hour behind my time."

"I am sorry for it, John," said Dot in a great bustle, "but I really could not think of

The Cricket on the Hearth

going to Bertha's — I would not do it, John, on any account — without the Veal and Ham-Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer. Way!"

This monosyllable was addressed to the horse, who didn't mind it at all.

"Oh *do* way John!" said Mrs. Peerybingle.
"Please!"

"It'll be time enough to do that," returned John, "when I begin to leave things behind me. The basket's here, safe enough."

"What a hard-hearted monster you must be, John, not to have said so, at once, and save me such a turn! I declared I wouldn't go to Bertha's without the Veal and Ham-Pie and things, and the bottles of Beer, for any money. Regularly once a fortnight ever since we have been married, John, have we made our little Picnic there. If anything was to go wrong with it, I should almost think we were never to be lucky again."

"It was a kind thought in the first instance," said the Carrier: "and I honor you for it, little woman."

"My dear John," replied Dot turning very red, "don't talk about honoring *me*. Good Gracious!"

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“By the bye —” observed the Carrier.
“That old gentleman,” —

Again so visibly, and instantly embarrassed!

“He’s an odd fish,” said the Carrier, looking straight along the road before them. “I can’t make him out. I don’t believe there’s any harm in him.”

“None at all. I’m — I’m sure there’s none at all.”

“Yes,” said the Carrier, with his eyes attracted to her face by the great earnestness of her manner. “I am glad you feel so certain of it, because it’s a confirmation to me. It’s curious that he should have taken it into his head to ask leave to go on lodging with us; an’t it? Things come about so strangely.”

“So very strangely,” she rejoined in a low voice scarcely audible.

“However, he’s a good-natured old gentleman,” said John, “and pays as a gentleman, and I think his word is to be relied upon, like a gentleman’s. I had quite a long talk with him this morning: he can hear me better already, he says, as he gets more used to my voice. He told me a great deal about himself, and I told him a good deal about myself, and a rare lot of questions he asked me. I gave

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him information about my having two beats, you know, in my business; one day to the right from our house and back again; another day to the left from our house and back again (for he's a stranger and don't know the names of places about here); and he seemed quite pleased. 'Why, then I shall be returning home to-night your way,' he says, 'when I thought you'd be coming in an exactly opposite direction. That's capital! I may trouble you for another lift perhaps, but I'll engage not to fall so sound asleep again.' He *was* sound asleep, surely! — Dot! what are you thinking of?"

"Thinking of, John? I — I was listening to you."

"Oh! That's all right!" said the honest Carrier. "I was afraid, from the look of your face, that I had gone rambling on so long, as to set you thinking about something else. I was very near it, I'll be bound."

Dot making no reply, they jogged on, for some little time, in silence. But, it was not easy to remain silent very long in John Peerybingle's cart, for everybody on the road had something to say. Though it might only be "How are you!" and indeed it was very often

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nothing else, still, to give that back again in the right spirit of cordiality, required, not merely a nod and a smile, but as wholesome an action of the lungs withal, as a long-winded Parliamentary speech. Sometimes, passengers on foot, or horseback, plodded on a little way beside the cart, for the express purpose of having a chat; and then there was a great deal to be said, on both sides.

Then, Boxer gave occasion to more good-natured recognitions of, and by, the Carrier, than half-a-dozen Christians could have done! Everybody knew him, all along the road—especially the fowls and pigs, who when they saw him approaching, with his body all on one side, and his ears pricked up inquisitively, and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air, immediately withdrew into remote back settlements, without waiting for the honor of a nearer acquaintance. He had business everywhere; going down all the turnings, looking into all the wells, bolting in and out of all the cottages, dashing into the midst of all the Dame-Schools, fluttering all the pigeons, magnifying the tails of all the cats, and trotting into the public-houses like a regular customer. Wherever he went, somebody or

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other might have been heard to cry, "Halloa ! Here's Boxer !" and out came that somebody forthwith, accompanied by at least two or three other somebodies, to give John Peerybingle and his pretty wife, Good Day.

The packages and parcels for the errand cart, were numerous; and there were many stoppages to take them in and give them out, which were not by any means the worst parts of the journey. Some people were so full of expectation about their parcels, and other people were so full of wonder about their parcels, and other people were so full of inexhaustible directions about their parcels, and John had such a lively interest in all the parcels, that it was as good as a play. Likewise, there were articles to carry, which required to be considered and discussed, and in reference to the adjustment and disposition of which, councils had to be holden by the Carrier and the senders: at which Boxer usually assisted, in short fits of the closest attention, and long fits of tearing round and round the assembled sages and barking himself hoarse. Of all these little incidents, Dot was the amused and open-eyed spectatress from her chair in the cart; and as she sat there, looking on — a

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charming little portrait framed to admiration by the tilt — there was no lack of nudgings and glancings and whisperings and envyings among the younger men. And this delighted John the Carrier, beyond measure; for he was proud to have his little wife admired, knowing that she didn't mind it — that, if anything, she rather liked it perhaps.

The trip was a little foggy, to be sure, in the January weather; and was raw and cold. But who cared for such trifles? Not Dot, decidedly. Not Tilly Slowboy, for she deemed sitting in a cart, on any terms, to be the highest point of human joys; the crowning circumstance of earthly hopes. Not the Baby, I'll be sworn; for it's not in Baby nature to be warmer or more sound asleep, though its capacity is great in both respects, than that blessed young Peerybingle was, all the way.

You couldn't see very far in the fog, of course; but you could see a great deal! It's astonishing how much you may see, in a thicker fog than that, if you will only take the trouble to look for it. Why, even to sit watching for the Fairy-rings in the fields, and for the patches of hoar-frost still lingering in the shade, near hedges and by trees, was a

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pleasant occupation: to make no mention of the unexpected shapes in which the trees themselves came starting out of the mist, and glided into it again. The hedges were tangled and bare, and waved a multitude of blighted garlands in the wind; but, there was no discouragement in this. It was agreeable to contemplate; for, it made the fireside warmer in possession, and the summer greener in expectancy. The river looked chilly; but it was in motion, and moving at a good pace—which was a great point. The canal was rather slow and torpid; that must be admitted. Never mind. It would freeze the sooner when the frost set fairly in, and then there would be skating and sliding; and the heavy old barges, frozen up somewhere near a wharf, would smoke their rusty iron chimney pipes all day, and have a lazy time of it.

In one place, there was a great mound of weeds or stubble burning; and they watched the fire, so white in the daytime, flaring through the fog, with only here and there a dash of red in it, until, in consequence as she observed of the smoke “getting up her nose,” Miss Slowboy choked—she could do anything of that sort, on the smallest provocation—

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and woke the Baby, who wouldn't go to sleep again. But, Boxer, who was in advance some quarter of a mile or so, had already passed the outposts of the town, and gained the corner of the street where Caleb and his daughter lived; and long before they had reached the door, he and the Blind Girl were on the pavement waiting to receive them.

Boxer, by the way, made certain delicate distinctions of his own, in his communications with Bertha, which persuade me fully that he knew her to be blind. He never sought to attract her attention by looking at her, as he often did with other people, but touched her invariably. What experience he could ever have had of blind people or blind dogs, I don't know. He had never lived with a blind master; nor had Mr. Boxer the elder, nor Mrs. Boxer, nor any of his respectable family on either side, ever been visited with blindness, that I am aware of. He may have found it out for himself, perhaps, but he had got hold of it somehow; and therefore he had hold of Bertha too, by the skirt, and kept hold, until Mrs. Peerybingle and the Baby, and Miss Slowboy, and the basket, were all got safely within doors.

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May Fielding was already come; and so was her mother—a little querulous chip of an old lady with a peevish face, who, in right of having preserved a waist like a bedpost, was supposed to be a most transcendent figure; and who, in consequence of having once been better off, or of laboring under an impression that she might have been, if something had happened which never did happen, and seemed to have never been particularly likely to come to pass—but it's all the same—was very genteel and patronizing indeed. Gruff and Tackleton was also there, doing the agreeable, with the evident sensation of being as perfectly at home, and as unquestionably in his own element, as a fresh young salmon on the top of the Great Pyramid.

“May! My dear old friend!” cried Dot, running to meet her. “What a happiness to see you!”

Her old friend was, to the full, as hearty and as glad as she; and it really was, if you'll believe me, quite a pleasant sight to see them embrace. Tackleton was a man of taste, beyond all question. May was very pretty.

You know sometimes, when you are used to a pretty face, how, when it comes into con-

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tact and comparison with another pretty face, it seems for the moment to be homely and faded, and hardly to deserve the high opinion you have had of it. Now, this was not at all the case, either with Dot or May; for May's face set off Dot's, and Dot's face set off May's, so naturally and agreeably, that, as John Peerybingle was very near saying when he came into the room, they ought to have been born sisters — which was the only improvement you could have suggested.

Tackleton had brought his leg of mutton, and, wonderful to relate, a tart besides — but we don't mind a little dissipation when our brides are in the case; we don't get married every day — and in addition to these dainties, there were the Veal and Ham-Pie, and "things," as Mrs. Peerybingle called them; which were chiefly nuts and oranges, and cakes, and such small deer. When the repast was set forth on the board, flanked by Caleb's contribution, which was a great wooden bowl of smoking potatoes (he was prohibited, by solemn compact, from producing any other viands), Tackleton led his intended mother-in-law to the post of honor. For the better gracing of this place at the high festival, the

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majestic old soul had adorned herself with a cap, calculated to inspire the thoughtless with sentiments of awe. She also wore her gloves. But let us be genteel, or die!

Caleb sat next his daughter; Dot and her old schoolfellow were side by side; the good Carrier took care of the bottom of the table. Miss Slowboy was isolated, for the time being, from every article of furniture but the chair she sat on, that she might have nothing else to knock the Baby's head against.

As Tilly stared about her at the dolls and toys, they stared at her and at the company. The venerable old gentlemen at the street door (who were all in full action) showed especial interest in the party, pausing occasionally before leaping, as if they were listening to the conversation, and then plunging wildly over and over, a great many times, without halting for breath—as in a frantic state of delight with the whole proceedings.

Certainly, if these old gentlemen were inclined to have a fiendish joy in the contemplation of Tackleton's discomfiture, they had good reason to be satisfied. Tackleton couldn't get on at all; and the more cheerful his intended bride became in Dot's society,

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the less he liked it, though he had brought them together for that purpose. For he was a regular dog in the manger, was Tackleton; and when they laughed and he couldn't, he took it into his head, immediately, that they must be laughing at him.

"Ah May!" said Dot. "Dear dear, what changes! To talk of those merry school-days makes one young again."

"Why, you an't particularly old, at any time; are you?" said Tackleton.

"Look at my sober plodding husband there," returned Dot. "He adds twenty years to my age at least. Don't you, John?"

"Forty," John replied.

"How many *you*'ll add to May's, I am sure I don't know," said Dot, laughing. "But she can't be much less than a hundred years of age on her next birthday."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Tackleton. Hollow as a drum, that laugh though. And he looked as if he could have twisted Dot's neck, comfortably.

"Dear, dear!" said Dot. "Only to remember how we used to talk, at school, about the husbands we would choose. I don't know how young, and how handsome, and how gay

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and how lively, mine was not to be ! And as to May's ! — Ah dear ! I don't know whether to laugh or cry, when I think what silly girls we were."

May seemed to know which to do; for the color flushed into her face, and tears stood in her eyes.

"Even the very persons themselves — real live young men — were fixed on sometimes," said Dot. "We little thought how things would come about. I never fixed on John, I'm sure; I never so much as thought of him. And if I had told you, you were ever to be married to Mr. Tackleton, why you'd have slapped me. Wouldn't you, May?"

Though May didn't say yes, she certainly didn't say no, or express no, by any means.

Tackleton laughed — quite shouted, he laughed so loud. John Peerybingle laughed too, in his ordinary good-natured and contented manner; but his was a mere whisper of a laugh, to Tackleton's.

"You couldn't help yourselves, for all that. You couldn't resist us, you see," said Tackleton. "Here we are ! Here we are ! Where are your gay young bridegrooms now ?"

"Some of them are dead," said Dot; "and

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some of them forgotten. Some of them, if they could stand among us at this moment, would not believe we were the same creatures; would not believe that what they saw and heard was real, and we *could* forget them so. No! they would not believe one word of it!"

"Why, Dot!" exclaimed the Carrier. "Little woman!"

She had spoken with such earnestness and fire, that she stood in need of some recalling to herself, without doubt. Her husband's check was very gentle, for he merely interfered, as he supposed, to shield old Tackleton; but it proved effectual, for she stopped, and said no more. There was an uncommon agitation, even in her silence, which the wary Tackleton, who had brought his half-shut eye to bear upon her, noted closely, and remembered to some purpose too.

May uttered no word, good or bad, but sat quite still, with her eyes cast down, and made no sign of interest in what had passed. The good lady her mother now interposed, observing, in the first instance, that girls were girls, and bygones bygones, and that so long as young people were young and thoughtless, they would probably conduct themselves like

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young and thoughtless persons: with two or three other positions of a no less sound and incontrovertible character. She then remarked, in a devout spirit, that she thanked Heaven she had always found in her daughter May, a dutiful and obedient child; for which she took no credit to herself, though she had every reason to believe it was entirely owing to herself. With regard to Mr. Tackleton she said, That he was in moral point of view an undeniable individual, and That he was in an eligible point of view a son-in-law to be desired, no one in their senses could doubt. (She was very emphatic here.) With regard to the family into which he was so soon about, after some solicitation, to be admitted, she believed Mr. Tackleton knew that, although reduced in purse, it had some pretensions to gentility; and if certain circumstances, not wholly unconnected, she would go so far as to say, with the Indigo Trade, but to which she would not more particularly refer, had happened differently, it might perhaps have been in possession of wealth. She then remarked that she would not allude to the past, and would not mention that her daughter had for some time rejected the suit of Mr. Tackleton;

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and that she would not say a great many other things which she did say at great length. Finally, she delivered it as the general result of her observation and experience, that those marriages in which there was least of what was romantically and sillily called love, were always the happiest; and that she anticipated the greatest possible amount of bliss—not rapturous bliss, but the solid, steady-going article—from the approaching nuptials. She concluded by informing the company that to-morrow was the day she had lived for, expressly; and that when it was over, she would desire nothing better than to be packed up and disposed of, in any genteel place of burial.

As these remarks were quite unanswerable—which is the happy property of all remarks that are sufficiently wide of the purpose—they changed the current of the conversation, and diverted the general attention to the Veal and Ham-Pie, the cold mutton, the potatoes, and the tart. In order that the bottled beer might not be slighted, John Peerybingle proposed To-morrow: the Wedding-Day; and called upon them to drink a bumper to it, before he proceeded on his journey.

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For you ought to know that he only rested there, and gave the old horse a bait. He had to go some four or five miles further on; and when he returned in the evening, he called for Dot, and took another rest on his way home. This was the order of the day on all the Picnic occasions, and had been, ever since their institution.

There were two persons present, besides the bride and bridegroom elect, who did but indifferent honor to the toast. One of these was Dot, too flushed and discomposed to adapt herself to any small occurrence of the moment; the other, Bertha, who rose up hurriedly, before the rest, and left the table.

“Good-by !” said stout John Peerybingle, pulling on his dreadnought coat. “I shall be back at the old time. Good-by all !”

“Good-by John,” returned Caleb.

He seemed to say it by rote, and to wave his hand in the same unconscious manner; for he stood observing Bertha with an anxious wondering face, that never altered its expression.

“Good-by young shaver !” said the jolly Carrier, bending down to kiss the child; which Tilly Slowboy, now intent upon her knife and

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fork, had deposited asleep (and strange to say, without damage) in a little cot of Bertha's furnishing; "good-by! Time will come, I suppose, when *you*'ll turn out into the cold, my little friend, and leave your old father to enjoy his pipe and his rheumatics in the chimney-corner; eh? Where's Dot?"

"I am here John!" she said, starting.

"Come, come!" returned the Carrier, clapping his sounding hands. "Where's the pipe?"

"I quite forgot the pipe, John."

Forgot the pipe! Was such a wonder ever heard of! She! Forgot the pipe!

"I'll — I'll fill it directly. It's soon done."

But it was not so soon done, either. It lay in the usual place — the Carrier's dreadnought pocket — with the little pouch, her own work, from which she was used to fill it; but her hand shook so, that she entangled it (and yet her hand was small enough to have come out easily, I am sure), and bungled terribly. The filling of the pipe and lighting it, those little offices in which I have commended her discretion, were vilely done, from first to last. During the whole process, Tackleton stood looking on maliciously with the half-closed eye; which,

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whenever it met hers—or caught it, for it can hardly be said to have ever met another eye: rather being a kind of trap to snatch it up—augmented her confusion in a most remarkable degree.

“Why, what a clumsy Dot you are, this afternoon!” said John. “I could have done it better myself, I verily believe!”

With these good-natured words, he strode away, and presently was heard, in company with Boxer, and the old horse, and the cart, making lively music down the road. What time the dreamy Caleb still stood, watching his blind daughter, with the same expression on his face.

“Bertha!” said Caleb, softly. “What has happened? How changed you are, my darling, in a few hours—since this morning. *You* silent and dull all day! What is it? Tell me!”

“Oh father, father!” cried the Blind Girl, bursting into tears. “Oh my hard, hard fate!” Caleb drew his hand across his eyes before he answered her.

“But think how cheerful and how happy you have been, Bertha! How good, and how much loved, by many people.”

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“That strikes me to the heart, dear father! Always so mindful of me! Always so kind to me!” Caleb was very much perplexed to understand her.

“To be — to be blind, Bertha, my poor dear,” he faltered, “is a great affliction; but —”

“I have never felt it!” cried the Blind Girl. “I have never felt it, in its fullness. Never! I have sometimes wished that I could see you, or could see him — only once, dear father, only for one little minute — that I might know what it is I treasure up,” she laid her hands upon her breast, “and hold here! That I might be sure and have it right! And sometimes (but then I was a child), I have wept in my prayers at night, to think that when your images ascended from my heart to Heaven, they might not be the true resemblance of yourselves. But I have never had these feelings long. They have passed away and left me tranquil and contented.”

“And they will again,” said Caleb.

“But father! Oh my good, gentle father, bear with me, if I am wicked!” said the Blind Girl. “This is not the sorrow that so weighs me down!”

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Her father could not choose but let his moist eyes overflow; she was so earnest and pathetic, but he did not understand her, yet.

“Bring her to me,” said Bertha. “I can not hold it closed and shut within myself. Bring her to me, father!”

She knew he hesitated, and said, “May. Bring May!”

May heard the mention of her name, and coming quietly towards her, touched her on the arm. The Blind Girl turned immediately, and held her by both hands.

“Look into my face, Dear heart, Sweet heart!” said Bertha. “Read it with your beautiful eyes, and tell me if the truth is written on it.”

“Dear Bertha, Yes!”

The Blind Girl still, upturning the blank sightless face, down which the tears were coursing fast, addressed her in these words:

“There is not, in my soul, a wish or thought that is not for your good, bright May! There is not, in my soul, a grateful recollection stronger than the deep remembrance which is stored there, of the many, many times when, in the full pride of sight and beauty, you have had consideration for Blind Bertha, even when

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we two were children, or when Bertha was as much a child as ever blindness can be! Every blessing on your head! Light upon your happy course! Not the less, my dear May; " and she drew towards her, in a closer grasp; "Not the less, my bird, because, to-day, the knowledge that you are to be His wife has wrung my heart almost to breaking! Father, May, Mary! oh forgive me that it is so, for the sake of all he has done to relieve the weariness of my dark life: and for the sake of the belief you have in me, when I call Heaven to witness that I could not wish him married to a wife more worthy of his goodness!"

While speaking, she had released May Fielding's hands, and clasped her garments in an attitude of mingled supplication and love. Sinking lower and lower down, as she proceeded in her strange confession, she dropped at last at the feet of her friend, and hid her blind face in the folds of her dress.

"Great Power!" exclaimed her father, smitten at one blow with the truth, "have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart at last!"

It was well for all of them that Dot, that

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beaming, useful, busy little Dot — for such she was, whatever faults she had, and however you may learn to hate her, in good time — it was well for all of them, I say, that she was there: or where this would have ended, it were hard to tell. But Dot, recovering her self-possession, interposed, before May could reply, or Caleb say another word.

“Come, come, dear Bertha! come away with me! Give her your arm, May. So! How composed she is, you see, already; and how good it is of her to mind us,” said the cheery little woman, kissing her upon the forehead. “Come away, dear Bertha. Come! and here’s her good father will come with her; won’t you, Caleb? To — be — sure!”

Well, well! she was a noble little Dot in such things, and it must have been an obdurate nature that could have withstood her influence. When she had got poor Caleb and his Bertha away, that they might comfort and console each other, as she knew they only could, she presently came bouncing back, — the saying is, as fresh as any daisy; *I* say fresher — to mount guard over that bridling little piece of consequence in the cap and gloves, and prevent the dear old creature from making discoveries.

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“So bring me the precious Baby, Tilly,” said she, drawing a chair to the fire; “and while I have it in my lap, here’s Mrs. Fielding, Tilly, will tell me all about the management of Babies, and put me right in twenty points where I’m as wrong as can be. Won’t you, Mrs. Fielding?”

Not even the Welsh Giant, who according to the popular expression, was so “slow” as to perform a fatal surgical operation upon himself, in emulation of a juggling-trick achieved by his arch-enemy at breakfast-time; not even he fell half so readily into the snare prepared for him, as the old lady did into this artful pitfall. The fact of Tackleton having walked out; and furthermore, of two or three people having been talking together at a distance, for two minutes, leaving her to her own resources, was quite enough to have put her on her dignity, and the bewailment of that mysterious convulsion in the Indigo trade, for four-and-twenty hours. But this becoming deference to her experience, on the part of the young mother, was so irresistible, that after a short affectation of humility, she began to enlighten her with the best grace in the world; and sitting bolt upright before the wicked Dot,

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she did in half an hour, deliver more infallible domestic recipes and precepts, than would (if acted on) have utterly destroyed and done up that Young Peerybingle, though he had been an Infant Samson.

To change the theme, Dot did a little needlework — she carried the contents of a whole workbox in her pocket; however she contrived it, I don't know — then did a little nursing; then a little more needlework; then had a little whispering chat with May, while the old lady dozed; and so in little bits of bustle, which was quite her manner always, found it a very short afternoon. Then, as it grew dark, and as it was a solemn part of this Institution of the Picnic that she should perform all Bertha's household tasks, she trimmed the fire, and swept the hearth, and set the tea-board out, and drew the curtain, and lighted a candle. Then she played an air or two on a rude kind of harp, which Caleb had contrived for Bertha, and played them very well; for Nature had made her delicate little ear as choice a one for music as it would have been for jewels, if she had had any to wear. By this time it was the established hour for having tea; and Tackleton came

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back again, to share the meal, and spend the evening.

Caleb and Bertha had returned some time before, and Caleb had sat down to his afternoon's work. But he couldn't settle to it, poor fellow, being anxious and remorseful for his daughter. It was touching to see him sitting idle on his working-stool, regarding her so wistfully, and always saying in his face, "Have I deceived her from the cradle, but to break her heart!"

When it was night, and tea was done, and Dot had nothing more to do in washing up the cups and saucers; in a word—for I must come to it, and there is no use in putting it off—when the time drew nigh for expecting the Carrier's return in every sound of distant wheels, her manner changed again, her color came and went, and she was very restless. Not as good wives are, when listening for their husbands. No, no, no. It was another sort of restlessness from that.

Wheels heard. A horse's feet. The barking of a dog. The gradual approach of all the sounds. The scratching paw of Boxer at the door.

"Whose step is that!" cried Bertha, starting up.

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"Whose step?" returned the Carrier, standing in the portal, with his brown face ruddy as a winter berry from the keen night air. "Why, mine."

"The other step," said Bertha. "The man's tread behind you!"

"She is not to be deceived," observed the Carrier, laughing. "Come along, sir. You'll be welcome, never fear!"

He spoke in a loud tone; and as he spoke, the deaf old gentleman entered.

"He's not so much a stranger, that you haven't seen him once, Caleb," said the Carrier. "You'll give him house-room till we go?"

"Oh surely, John, and take it as an honor."

"He's the best company on earth, to talk secrets in," said John. "I have reasonable good lungs, but he tries 'em, I can tell you. Sit down sir. All friends here, and glad to see you!"

When he had imparted this assurance, in a voice that amply corroborated what he had said about his lungs, he added in his natural tone, "A chair in the chimney-corner, and leave to sit quite silent and look pleasantly about him, is all he cares for. He's easily pleased."

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Bertha had been listening intently. She called Caleb to her side, when he had set the chair, and asked him, in a low voice, to describe their visitor. When he had done so (truly now; with scrupulous fidelity), she moved, for the first time since he had come in, and sighed, and seemed to have no further interest concerning him.

The Carrier was in high spirits, good fellow that he was, and fonder of his little wife than ever.

“A clumsy Dot she was, this afternoon!” he said, encircling her with his rough arm, as she stood, removed from the rest; “and yet I like her somehow. See yonder, Dot!”

He pointed to the old man. She looked down. I think she trembled.

“He’s—ha, ha, ha!—he’s full of admiration for you!” said the Carrier. “Talked of nothing else, the whole way here. Why, he’s a brave old boy. I like him for it!”

“I wish he had had a better subject, John;” she said, with an uneasy glance about the room. At Tackleton especially.

“A better subject!” cried the jovial John. “There’s no such thing. Come, off with the great-coat, off with the thick shawl, off with

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the heavy wrappers ! and a cozy half hour by the fire ! My humble service, Mistress. A game at cribbage, you and I ? That's hearty. The cards and board, Dot. And a glass of beer here, if there's any left, small wife ! ”

His challenge was addressed to the old lady, who accepting it with gracious readiness, they were soon engaged upon the game. At first, the Carrier looked about him sometimes, with a smile, or now and then called Dot to peep over his shoulder at his hand, and advise him on some knotty point. But his adversary being a rigid disciplinarian, and subject to an occasional weakness in respect of pegging more than she was entitled to, required such vigilance on his part, as left him neither eyes nor ears to spare. Thus, his whole attention gradually became absorbed upon the cards; and he thought of nothing else, until a hand upon his shoulder restored him to a consciousness of Tackleton.

“ I am sorry to disturb you — but a word, directly.”

“ I'm going to deal,” returned the Carrier.
“ It's a crisis.”

“ It is,” said Tackleton. “ Come here, man ! ”

The Cricket on the Hearth

There was that in his pale face which made the other rise immediately, and ask him, in a hurry, what the matter was.

“Hush! John Peerybingle,” said Tackleton. “I am sorry for this. I am indeed. I have been afraid of it. I have suspected it from the first.”

“What is it?” asked the Carrier, with a frightened aspect.

“Hush! I’ll show you, if you’ll come with me.”

The Carrier accompanied him, without another word. They went across a yard, where the stars were shining, and by a little side-door, into Tackleton’s own counting-house, where there was a glass window commanding the ware-room, which was closed for the night. There was no light in the counting-house itself, but there were lamps in the long narrow ware-room; and consequently the window was bright.

“A moment!” said Tackleton. “Can you bear to look through that window, do you think?” “Why not?” returned the Carrier.

“A moment more,” said Tackleton. “Don’t commit any violence. It’s of no use. It’s dangerous too. You’re a strong-made man; and you might do murder before you knew it.”

The Cricket on the Hearth

The Carrier looked him in the face, and recoiled a step as if he had been struck. In one stride he was at the window, and he saw — Oh Shadow on the Hearth! O truthful Cricket! Oh perfidious wife!

He saw her, with the old man — old no longer, but erect and gallant — bearing in his hand the false white hair that had won his way into their desolate and miserable home. He saw her listening to him, as he bent his head to whisper in her ear; and suffering him to clasp her round the waist, as they moved slowly down the long wooden gallery towards the door by which they had entered it. He saw them stop, and saw her turn — to have the face, the face he loved so, so presented to his view! — and saw her, with her own hands, adjust the lie upon his head, laughing, as she did it, at his unsuspecting nature!

He clenched his strong right hand at first, as if he would have beaten down a lion. But opening it immediately again, he spread it out before the eyes of Tackleton (for he was tender of her, even then), and so, as they passed out, fell down upon a desk, and was as weak as any infant.

He was wrapped up to the chin, and busy with his horse and parcels, when she came into the room, prepared for going home.

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Now John, dear! Good-night, May! Good-night, Bertha!”

Could she kiss them? Could she be blithe and cheerful in her parting? Could she venture to reveal her face to them without a blush? Yes. Tackleton observed her closely, and she did all this.

Tilly was hushing the Baby, and she crossed and re-crossed Tackleton, a dozen times, repeating drowsily:

“Did the knowledge that it was to be its wives, then, wring its hearts almost to breaking; and did its fathers deceive it from its cradles but to break its hearts at last!”

“Now Tilly, give me the Baby! Good-night, Mr. Tackleton. Where’s John, for goodness’ sake?”

“He’s going to walk, beside the horse’s head,” said Tackleton; who helped her to her seat.

“My dear John. Walk? To-night?”

The muffled figure of her husband made a hasty sign in the affirmative; and the false stranger and the little nurse being in their places, the old horse moved off. Boxer, the unconscious Boxer, running on before, running back, running round and round the cart, and barking as triumphantly and merrily as ever.

The Cricket on the Hearth

When Tackleton had gone off likewise, escorting May and her mother home, poor Caleb sat down by the fire beside his daughter; anxious and remorseful at the core; and still saying in his wistful contemplation of her, "Have I deceived her from her cradle, but to break her heart at last!"

The toys that had been set in motion for the Baby, had all stopped, and run down, long ago. In the faint light and silence, the imperturbably calm dolls, the agitated rocking-horses with distended eyes and nostrils, the old gentlemen at the street-doors, standing half doubled up upon their failing knees and ankles, the wry-faced nutcrackers, the very Beasts upon their way into the Ark, in twos, like a Boarding School out walking, might have been imagined to be stricken motionless with fantastic wonder, at Dot being false, or Tackleton beloved, under any combination of circumstances.

The Cricket on the Hearth

CHIRP THE THIRD

The Dutch clock in the corner struck Ten, when the Carrier sat down by his fireside. So troubled and grief-worn, that he seemed to scare the Cuckoo, who, having cut his ten melodious announcements as short as possible, plunged back into the Moorish palace again, and clapped his little door behind him, as if the unwonted spectacle were too much for his feelings.

If the little Haymaker had been armed with the sharpest of scythes, and had cut at every stroke into the Carrier's heart, he never could have gashed and wounded it as Dot had done.

It was a heart so full of love for her; so bound up and held together by innumerable threads of winning remembrance, spun from the daily workings of her many qualities of endearments; it was a heart in which she had enshrined herself so gently and so closely; a heart so single and so earnest in its Truth, so strong in right, so weak in wrong; that it could cherish neither passion nor revenge at first,

The Cricket on the Hearth

and had only room to hold the broken image of its Idol.

But, slowly, slowly, as the Carrier sat brooding on his hearth, now cold and dark, other and fiercer thoughts began to rise within him, as an angry wind comes rising in the night. The Stranger was beneath his outraged roof. Three steps would take him to his chamber-door. One blow would beat it in. "You might do murder before you know it," Tackleton had said. How could it be murder, if he gave the villain time to grapple with him hand to hand! He was the younger man.

It was an ill-timed thought, bad for the dark mood of his mind. It was an angry thought, goading him to some avenging act, that should change the cheerful house into a haunted place which lonely travellers would dread to pass by night; and where the timid would see shadows struggling in the ruined windows when the moon was dim, and hear wild noises in the stormy weather.

He was the younger man! Yes, yes; some lover who had won the heart that *he* had never touched. Some lover of her early choice, of whom she had thought and dreamed,

The Cricket on the Hearth

for whom she had pined and pined, when he had fancied her so happy by his side. O agony to think of it!

She had been above stairs with the Baby, getting it to bed. As he sat brooding on the hearth, she came close beside him, without his knowledge — in the turning of the rack of his great misery, he lost all other sounds — and put her little stool at his feet. He only knew it when he felt her hand upon his own, and saw her looking up into his face.

With wonder? No. It was his first impression, and he was fain to look at her again, to set it right. No, not with wonder. With an eager and inquiring look; but not with wonder. At first it was alarmed and serious; then, it changed into a strange, wild, dreadful smile of recognition of his thoughts; then, there was nothing but her clasped hands on her brow, and her bent head, and falling hair.

Though the power of Omnipotence had been his to wield at that moment, he had too much of its diviner property of Mercy in his breast to have turned one feather's weight of it against her. But he could not bear to see her crouching down upon the little seat where he had often looked on her, with love and

The Cricket on the Hearth

pride, so innocent and gay; and when she rose and left him, sobbing as she went, he felt it a relief to have the vacant place beside him rather than her so long cherished presence. This in itself was anguish keener than all, reminding him how desolate he was become, and how the great bond of his life was rent asunder.

The more he felt this, and the more he knew he could have better borne to see her lying prematurely dead before him with their little child upon her breast, the higher and the stronger rose his wrath against his enemy. He looked about him for a weapon.

There was a gun, hanging on the wall. He took it down, and moved a pace or two towards the door of the perfidious Stranger's room. He knew the gun was loaded. Some shadowy idea that it was just to shoot this man like a wild beast, seized him, and dilated in his mind until it grew into a monstrous demon in complete possession of him, casting out all milder thoughts and setting up its undivided empire.

That phrase is wrong. Not casting out his milder thoughts, but artfully transforming them. Changing them into scourges to drive

The Cricket on the Hearth

him on. Turning water into blood, love into hate, gentleness into blind ferocity. Her image, sorrowing, humbled, but still pleading to his tenderness and mercy with resistless power, never left his mind; but, staying there, it urged him to the door; raised the weapon to his shoulder; fitted and nerved his finger to the trigger; and cried "Kill him! In his bed!"

He reversed the gun to beat the stock upon the door; he already held it lifted in the air; some indistinct design was in his thoughts of calling out to him to fly, for God's sake, by the window —

When, suddenly, the struggling fire illumined the whole chimney with a glow of light; and the Cricket on the Hearth began to Chirp!

No sound he could have heard, no human voice, not even hers, could so have moved and softened him. The artless words in which she had told him of her love for this same Cricket, were once more freshly spoken; her trembling, earnest manner at the moment, was again before him; her pleasant voice — O what a voice it was, for making household music at the fire-side of an honest man! — thrilled through and through his better nature, and awoke it into life and action.

The Cricket on the Hearth

He recoiled from the door, like a man walking in his sleep, awakened from a frightful dream: and put the gun aside. Claspings his hands before his face, he then sat down again beside the fire, and found relief in tears.

The Cricket on the Hearth came out into the room, and stood in Fairy shape before him.

“ ‘I love it,’ ” said the Fairy Voice, repeating what he well remembered, “ ‘for the many times I have heard it, and the many thoughts its harmless music has given me.’ ”

“She said so!” cried the Carrier. “True!”

“ ‘This has been a happy home, John: and I love the Cricket for its sake!’ ”

“It has been, Heaven knows,” returned the Carrier. “She made it happy, always,—until now.”

“So gracefully sweet-tempered; so domestic, joyful, busy, and light-hearted!” said the Voice.

“Otherwise I never could have loved her as I did,” returned the Carrier.

The Voice, correcting him, said “do.”

The Carrier repeated “as I did.” But not firmly. His faltering tongue resisted his control, and would speak in its own way, for itself and him.

The Cricket on the Hearth

The Figure in an attitude of invocation, raised its head and said: "Upon your own hearth" — "The hearth she has blighted," interposed the Carrier.

"The hearth she has — how often! — blessed and brightened," said the Cricket; "the hearth which, but for her, were only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, but which has been, through her, the Altar of your Home; on which you have nightly sacrificed some petty passions, selfishness, or care, and offered up the homage of a tranquil mind, a trusting nature, and an overflowing heart; so that the smoke from this poor chimney has gone upward with a better fragrance than the richest incense that is burnt before the richest shrines in all the gaudy temples of this world! — Upon your own hearth; in its quiet sanctuary; surrounded by its gentle influences and associations; hear her! Hear me! Hear everything that speaks the language of your hearth and home!"

"And pleads for her?" inquired the Carrier.

"All things that speak the language of your hearth and home, *must* plead for her!" returned the Cricket. "For they speak the truth."

The Cricket on the Hearth

And while the Carrier, with his head upon his hands, continued to sit meditating in his chair, the Presence stood beside him, suggesting his reflections by its power, and presenting them before him, as in a glass or picture. It was not a solitary Presence. From the hearthstone, from the chimney, from the clock, the pipe, the kettle, and the cradle; from the floor, the walls, the ceiling, and the stairs; from the cart without, and the cupboard within, and the household implements; from everything and every place with which she had ever been familiar, and with which she had ever entwined one recollection of herself in her unhappy husband's mind; Fairies came trooping forth. Not to stand beside him as the Cricket did, but to busy and bestir themselves. To do all honor to her image. To pull him by the skirts, and point to it when it appeared. To cluster round it, and embrace it, and strew flowers for it to tread on. To try to crown its fair head with their tiny hands. To show that they were fond of it and loved it; and that there was not one ugly, wicked, or accusatory creature to claim knowledge of it—none but their playful and approving selves.

The Cricket on the Hearth

His thoughts were constant to her image. It was always there.

She sat plying her needle, before the fire, and singing to herself. Such a blithe, thriving, steady little Dot! The fairy figures turned upon him all at once, by one consent, with one prodigious concentrated stare, and seemed to say "Is this the light wife you are mourning for!"

There were sound of gayety outside, musical instruments, and noisy tongues, and laughter. A crowd of young merry-makers came pouring in, among whom were May Fielding and a score of pretty girls. Dot was the fairest of them all; as young as any of them too. They came to summon her to join their party. It was a dance. If ever little foot were made for dancing, hers was, surely. But she laughed, and shook her head, and pointed to her cookery on the fire, and her table ready spread: with an exulting defiance that rendered her more charming than she was before. And so she merrily dismissed them, nodding to her would-be partners, one by one, as they passed, but with a comical indifference, enough to make them go and drown themselves immediately if they were her admirers—and

The Cricket on the Hearth

they must have been so, more or less; they couldn't help it. And yet indifference was not her character. O no! For presently, there came a certain Carrier to the door; and bless her what a welcome she bestowed upon him!

Again the staring figures turned upon him all at once, and seemed to say "Is this the wife who has forsaken you!"

A shadow fell upon the mirror or the picture; call it what you will. A great shadow of the Stranger, as he first stood underneath their roof; covering its surface, and blotting out all other objects. But the nimble Fairies worked like bees to clear it off again. And Dot again was there. Still bright and beautiful.

Rocking her little Baby in its cradle, singing to it softly, and resting her head upon a shoulder which had its counterpart in the musing figure by which the Fairy Cricket stood.

The night—I mean the real night: not going by Fairy clocks—was wearing now; and in this stage of the Carrier's thoughts, the moon burst out, and shone brightly in the sky. Perhaps some calm and quiet light had risen also, in his mind; and he could think more soberly of what had happened.

The Cricket on the Hearth

Although the shadow of the Stranger fell at intervals upon the glass—always distinct, and big, and thoroughly defined—it never fell so darkly as at first. Whenever it appeared, the Fairies uttered a general cry of consternation, and plied their little arms and legs, with inconceivable activity, to rub it out. And whenever they got at Dot again, and showed her to him once more, bright and beautiful, they cheered in the most inspiring manner.

They never showed her, otherwise than beautiful and bright, for they were Households Spirits to whom falsehood is annihilation; and being so, what Dot was there for them, but the one active, beaming, pleasant little creature who had been the light and sun of the Carrier's Home!

The Fairies were prodigiously excited when they showed her, with the Baby, gossiping among a knot of sage old matrons, and affecting to be wondrous old and matronly herself, and leaning in a staid, demure old way upon her husband's arm, attempting—she! such a bud of a little woman—to convey the idea of having abjured the vanities of the world in general, and of being the sort of person to

The Cricket on the Hearth

whom it was no novelty at all to be a mother; yet in the same breath, they showed her, laughing at the Carrier for being awkward, and pulling up his shirt-collar to make him smart, and mincing merrily about that very room to teach him how to dance!

They turned, and stared immensely at him when they showed her with the Blind Girl; for, though she carried cheerfulness and animation with her wheresoever she went, she bore those influences into Caleb Plummer's home, heaped up and running over. The Blind Girl's love for her, and trust in her, and gratitude to her; her own good busy way of setting Bertha's thanks aside; her dexterous little arts for filling up each moment of the visit in doing something useful to the house, and really working hard while feigning to make holiday; her bountiful provision of those standing delicacies, the Veal and Ham-pie and the bottles of Beer; her radiant little face arriving at the door, and taking leave; the wonderful expression in her whole self, from her neat foot to the crown of her head, of being a part of the establishment—a something necessary to it, which it couldn't be without; all this the Fairies revelled in,

The Cricket on the Hearth

and loved her for. And once again they looked upon him all at once, appealingly, and seemed to say, while some among them nestled in her dress and fondled her, "Is this the wife who has betrayed your confidence!"

More than once, or twice, or thrice, in the long thoughtful night, they showed her to him sitting on her favorite seat, with her bent head, her hands clasped on her brow, her falling hair. As he had seen her last. And when they found her thus, they neither turned nor looked upon him, but gathered close round her, and comforted and kissed her, and pressed on one another to show sympathy and kindness to her, and forgot him altogether.

Thus the night passed. The moon went down; the stars grew pale; the cold day broke; the sun rose. The Carrier still sat, musing, in the chimney corner. He had sat there, with his head upon his hands, all night. All night the faithful Cricket had been Chirp, Chirp, Chirping on the Hearth. All night he had listened to its voice. All night the household Fairies had been busy with him. All night she had been amiable and blameless in the glass, except when that one shadow fell upon it.

The Cricket on the Hearth

He rose up when it was broad day, and washed and dressed himself. He couldn't go about his customary cheerful avocations—he wanted spirit for them—but it mattered the less that it was Tackleton's wedding-day, and he had arranged to make his rounds by proxy. He thought to have gone merrily to church with Dot. But such plans were at an end. It was their own wedding-day too. Ah! how little he had looked for such a close to such a year!

(Continued in Part Fourteen.)

Part Fourteen

The Literary Powers (Continued)



THE TOMB OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

The Cricket on the Hearth
(Concluded)

CHARLES DICKENS

The Cricket on the Hearth

entered it since. He is away of his own free will. I'd go out gladly at that door, and beg my bread from house to house, for life, if I could so change the past that he had never come. But he has come and gone. And I have done with him !”

“Oh !—Well, I think he has got off pretty easy,” said Tackleton, taking a chair.

The sneer was lost upon the Carrier, who sat down too, and shaded his face with his hand, for some little time, before proceeding.

“You showed me last night,” he said at length, “my wife; my wife that I love; secretly—”

“And tenderly,” insinuated Tackleton.

“Conniving at that man's disguise, and giving him opportunities of meeting her alone. I think there's no sight I wouldn't have rather seen than that. I think there's no man in the world I wouldn't have rather had to show it me.”

“I confess to having had my suspicions always,” said Tackleton. “And that has made me objectionable here I know.”

“But as you did show it me,” pursued the Carrier, not minding him; “and as you saw her, my wife, my wife that I love”—his voice

The Cricket on the Hearth

and eye, and hand, grew steadier and firmer as he repeated these words: evidently in pursuance of a steadfast purpose — “as you saw her at this disadvantage, it is right and just that you should also see with my eyes, and look into my breast, and know what my mind is, upon the subject. For it’s settled,” said the Carrier, regarding him attentively. “And nothing can shake it now.”

Tackleton muttered a few general words of assent, about its being necessary to vindicate something or other; but he was overawed by the manner of his companion. Plain and unpolished as it was, it had a something dignified and noble in it, which nothing but the soul of generous honor dwelling in the man could have imparted.

“I am a plain, rough man,” pursued the Carrier, “with very little to recommend me. I am not a clever man, as you very well know. I am not a young man. I love my little Dot, because I had seen her grow up, from a child, in her father’s house; because I knew how precious she was; because she had been my life, for years and years. There’s many men I can’t compare with, who never could have loved my little Dot like me, I think!”

The Cricket on the Hearth

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The Cricket on the Hearth

He paused, and softly beat the ground a short time with his foot, before resuming.

"I often thought that though I wasn't good enough for her, I should make her a kind husband, and perhaps know her value better than another; and in this way I reconciled it to myself, and came to think it might be possible that we should be married. And in the end it came about, and we *were* married."

"Hah!" said Tackleton, with a significant shake of the head.

"I had studied myself; I had had experience of myself; I knew how much I loved her, and how happy I should be," pursued the Carrier. "But I had not—I feel it now—sufficiently considered her."

"To be sure," said Tackleton. "Giddiness, frivolity, fickleness, love of admiration! Not considered! All left out of sight! Hah!"

"You had best not interrupt me," said the Carrier, with some sternness, "till you understand me; and you're wide of doing so. If, yesterday, I'd have struck that man down at a blow, who dared to breathe a word against her, to-day I'd set my foot upon his face, if he was my brother!"

The Toy-merchant gazed at him in astonishment. He went on in a softer tone:

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Did I consider,” said the Carrier, “that I took her — at her age, and with her beauty — from her young companions, and the many scenes of which she was the ornament, in which she was the brightest little star that ever shone, to shut her up from day to day in my dull house, and keep my tedious company? Did I consider how little suited I was to her sprightly humor, and how wearisome a plodding man like me must be, to one of her quick spirit? Did I consider that it was no merit in me, or claim in me, that I loved her, when everybody must, who knew her? Never. I took advantage of her hopeful nature and her cheerful disposition; and I married her. I wish I never had! For her sake; not for mine!” The Toy-merchant gazed at him, without winking. Even the half-shut eye was open now.

“Heaven bless her!” said the Carrier, “for the cheerful constancy with which she tried to keep the knowledge of this from me! And Heaven help me, that, in my slow mind, I have not found it out before! Poor child! Poor Dot! I not to find it out, who have seen her eyes fill with tears, when such a marriage as our own was spoken of! I, who have seen the secret trembling on her

The Cricket on the Hearth

lips a hundred times, and never suspected it till last night ! Poor girl ! That I could ever hope she would be fond of me ! That I could ever believe she was ! ”

“ She made a show of it,” said Tackleton.

“ She made such a show of it, that to tell you the truth it was the origin of my misgivings.”

And here he asserted the superiority of May Fielding, who certainly made no sort of show of being fond of *him*.

“ She has tried,” said the poor Carrier, with greater emotion than he had exhibited yet ; “ I only now begin to know how hard she has tried, to be my dutiful and zealous wife. How good she has been ; how much she has done ; how brave and strong a heart she has ; let the happiness I have known under this roof bear witness ! It will be some help and comfort to me, when I am here alone.”

“ Here alone ? ” said Tackleton. “ Oh ! Then you do mean to take some notice of this ? ”

“ I mean,” returned the Carrier, “ to do her the greatest kindness, and make her the best reparation, in my power. I can release her from the daily pain of an unequal marriage, and the struggle to conceal it. She shall be as free as I can render her.”

The Cricket on the Hearth

“Make *her* reparation !” exclaimed Tackleton, twisting and turning his great ears with his hands. “There must be something wrong here. You didn’t say that, of course.”

The Carrier set his grip upon the collar of the Toy-merchant, and shook him like a reed.

“Listen to me !” he said. “And take care that you hear me right. Listen to me. Do I speak plainly ?”

“Very plainly indeed,” answered Tackleton.

“As if I meant it ?”

“Very much as if you meant it.”

“I sat upon that hearth, last night, all night,” exclaimed the Carrier. “On the spot where she has often sat beside me, with her sweet face looking into mine. I called up her whole life, day by day. I had her dear self, in its every passage, in review before me. And upon my soul she is innocent, if there is One to judge the innocent and guilty !”

Staunch Cricket on the Hearth ! Loyal household Fairies !

“Passion and distrust have left me !” said the Carrier ; “and nothing but my grief remains. In an unhappy moment some old lover, better suited to her tastes and years than I ; forsaken, perhaps, for me, against her will ; returned. In an unhappy moment,

The Cricket on the Hearth

taken by surprise, and wanting time to think of what she did, she made herself a party to his treachery, by concealing it. Last night she saw him, in the interview we witnessed. It was wrong. But otherwise than this she is innocent if there is truth on earth !”

“If that is your opinion”—Tackleton began.

“So, let her go !” pursued the Carrier.
“Go, with my blessing for the many happy hours she has given me, and my forgiveness for any pang she has caused me. Let her go, and have the peace of mind I wish her ! She’ll never hate me. She’ll learn to like me better, when I’m not a drag upon her, and she wears the chain I have riveted, more lightly. This is the day on which I took her, with so little thought for her enjoyment, from her home. To-day she shall return to it, and I will trouble her no more. Her father and mother will be here to-day — we had made a little plan for keeping it together — and they shall take her home. I can trust her, there, or anywhere. She leaves me without blame, and she will live so I am sure. If I should die — I may perhaps while she is still young ; I have lost some courage in a few hours —

The Cricket on the Hearth

she'll find that I remembered her, and loved her to the last! This is the end of what you showed me. Now, it's over!"

"O no, John, not over. Do not say it's over yet! Not quite yet. I have heard your noble words. I could not steal away pretending to be ignorant of what has affected me with such deep gratitude. Do not say it's over, 'till the clock has struck again!"

She had entered shortly after Tackleton, and had remained there. She never looked at Tackleton, but fixed her eyes upon her husband. But she kept away from him, setting as wide a space as possible between them; and though she spoke with most impassioned earnestness, she went no nearer to him even then. How different in this from her old self!

"No hand can make the clock which will strike again for me the hours that are gone," replied the Carrier, with a faint smile. "But let it be so, if you will, my dear. It will strike soon. It's of little matter what we say. I'd try to please you in a harder case than that."

"Well!" muttered Tackleton. I must be off, for when the clock strikes again, it'll

The Cricket on the Hearth

be necessary for me to be upon my way to church. Good-morning, John Perrybingle. I'm sorry to be deprived of the pleasure of your company. Sorry for the loss, and the occasion of it too ! ”

“ I have spoken plainly ? ” said the Carrier, accompanying him to the door.

“ Oh quite ! ”

“ And you'll remember what I have said ? ”

“ Why, if you compel me to make the observation,” said Tackleton, previously taking the precaution of getting into his chaise; “ I must say that it was so very unexpected, that I'm far from being likely to forget it.”

“ The better for us both,” returned the Carrier. “ Good-by. I give you joy ! ”

“ I wish I could give it to *you*,” said Tackleton. “ As I can't; thank'ee. Between ourselves (as I told you before, eh ?) I don't much think I shall have the less joy in my married life, because May hasn't been too officious about me, and too demonstrative. Good-by. Take care of yourself.”

The Carrier stood looking after him until he was smaller in the distance than his horse's flowers and favors near at hand; and then, with a deep sigh, went strolling like a restless,

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broken man, among some neighboring elms; unwilling to return until the clock was on the eve of striking.

His little wife, being left alone, sobbed pit-eously; but often dried her eyes and checked herself, to say how good he was, how excellent he was ! and once or twice she laughed; so heartily, triumphantly, and incoherently (still crying all the time), that Tilly was quite horrified.

“Ow if you please don’t ! ” said Tilly “It’s enough to dead and bury the Baby, so it is if you please.”

“Will you bring him sometimes, to see his father, Tilly,” inquired her mistress, drying her eyes; “when I can’t live here, and have gone to my old home ?”

“Ow if you please don’t !” cried Tilly, throwing back her head, and bursting out into a howl — she looked at the moment uncommonly like Boxer; “Ow if you please don’t ! Ow, what has everybody gone and been and done with everybody, making everybody else so wretched ! Ow-w-w-w !”

The soft-hearted Slowboy trailed off at this juncture, into such a deplorable howl, the more tremendous from its long suppression, that

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she must infallibly have awakened the Baby, and frightened him into something serious (probably convulsions), if her eyes had not encountered Caleb Plummer, leading in his daughter. This spectacle restoring her to a sense of the proprieties, she stood for some few moments silent, with her mouth wide open; and then, posting off to the bed on which the Baby lay asleep, danced in a weird, Saint Vitus manner on the floor, and at the same time rummaged with her face and head among the bedclothes, apparently deriving much relief from those extraordinary operations.

"Mary!" said Bertha. "Not at the marriage!"

"I told her you would not be there, mum," whispered Caleb. "I heard as much last night. But bless you," said the little man, taking her tenderly by both hands, "*I* don't care for what they say. *I* don't believe them. There an't much of me, but that little should be torn to pieces sooner than I'd trust a word against you."

He put his arms about her and hugged her, as a child might have hugged one of his own dolls.

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“Bertha couldn’t stay at home this morning,” said Caleb. “She was afraid, I know, to hear the bells ring, and couldn’t trust herself to be so near them on their wedding-day. So we started in good time and came here. I have been thinking of what I have done,” said Caleb, after a moment’s pause; “I have been blaming myself till I hardly knew what to do or where to turn, for the distress of mind I have caused her; and I’ve come to the conclusion that I’d better, if you’ll stay with me, mum, the while, tell her the truth. You’ll stay with me the while?” he inquired, trembling from head to foot. “I don’t know what effect it may have upon her; I don’t know what she’ll think of me; I don’t know that she’ll ever care for her poor father afterwards. But it’s best for her that she should be undeceived, and I must bear the consequences as I deserve!”

“Mary,” said Bertha, “where is your hand! Ah! Here it is: here it is!” pressing it to her lips, with a smile, and drawing it through her arm. “I heard them speaking softly among themselves, last night, of some blame against you. They were wrong.” The Carrier’s Wife was silent. Caleb answered for her.

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"They were wrong," he said.

"I knew it!" cried Bertha proudly. "I told them so. I scorned to hear a word! Blame *her* with justice!" she pressed her hand between her own, and the soft cheek against her face. "No! I am not so blind as that."

Her father went on one side of her, while Dot remained upon the other: holding her hand.

"I know you all," said Bertha, "better than you think. But none so well as her. Not even you, father. There is nothing half so real and so true about me, as she is. If I could be restored to sight this instant, and not a word were spoken, I could choose her from a crowd! My sister!"

"Bertha, my dear," said Caleb, "I have something on my mind I want to tell you, while we three are alone. Hear me kindly! I have a confession to make to you, my darling."

"A confession, father?"

"I have wandered from the truth and lost myself, my child," said Caleb, with a pitiable expression in his bewildered face. "I have wandered from the truth, intending to be kind to you; and have been cruel."

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She turned her wonder-stricken face towards him, and repeated "Cruel!"

"He accuses himself too strongly, Bertha," said Dot. "You'll say so, presently. You'll be the first to tell him so."

"He cruel to me!" cried Bertha, with a smile of incredulity.

"Not meaning it, my child," said Caleb. "But I have been; though I never suspected it, till yesterday. My dear blind daughter, hear me and forgive me! The world you live in, heart of mine, doesn't exist as I have represented it. The eyes you have trusted in, have been false to you." She turned her wonder-stricken face towards him still; but drew back, and clung closer to her friend.

"Your road in life was rough, my poor one," said Caleb, "and I meant to smooth it for you. I have altered objects, changed the characters of people, invented many things that never have been, to make you happier. I have had concealments from you, put deceptions on you, God forgive me! and surrounded you with fancies."

"But living people are not fancies!" she said hurriedly, and turning very pale, and still retiring from him. "You can't change them."

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"I have done so, Bertha," pleaded Caleb.
"There is one person that you know, my dove—"

"Oh, father! why do you say I know!" she answered, in a tone of keen reproach.
"What and whom do I know! I, who have no leader! I, so miserably blind!"

In the anguish of her heart, she stretched out her hands, as if she were groping her way; then spread them, in a manner most forlorn and sad, upon her face.

"The marriage that takes place to-day," said Caleb, "is with a stern, sordid, grinding man. A hard master to you and me, my dear, for many years. Ugly in his looks, and in his nature. Cold and callous always. Unlike what I have painted him to you in everything, my child. In everything."

"Oh, why," cried the Blind Girl, tortured, as it seemed, almost beyond endurance, "why did you ever do this! Why did you ever fill my heart so full, and then come in like Death, and tear away the objects of my love! O Heaven, how blind I am! How helpless and alone!"

Her afflicted father hung his head, and offered no reply but in his penitence and sorrow.

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She had been but a short time in this passion of regret, when the Cricket on the Hearth, unheard by all but her, began to chirp. Not merrily, but in a low, faint sorrowing way. It was so mournful that her tears began to flow; and when the Presence which had been beside the Carrier all night, appeared behind her, pointing to her father, they fell down like rain.

She heard the Cricket-voice more plainly soon, and was conscious, through her blindness, of the Presence hovering about her father.

"Mary," said the Blind Girl, "tell me what my home is. What it truly is."

"It is a poor place, Bertha; very poor and bare indeed. The house will scarcely keep out wind and rain another winter. It is as roughly shielded from the weather, Bertha," Dot continued in a low, clear voice, "as your poor father in his sack-cloth coat."

The Blind Girl, greatly agitated, rose, and led the Carrier's little wife aside.

"Those presents that I took such care of; that came almost at my wish, and were so dearly welcome to me," she said, trembling; "where did they come from? Did you send them?"

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“No.”

“Who then?”

Dot saw she knew, already, and was silent. The Blind Girl spread her hands before her face again. But in quite another manner now.

“Dear Mary, a moment. One moment! More this way. Speak softly to me. You are true, I know. You’d not deceive me now; would you?”

“No, Bertha, indeed!”

“No, I am sure you would not. You have too much pity for me. Mary, look across the room to where we were just now — to where my father is — my father, so compassionate and loving to me — and tell me what you see.”

“I see,” said Dot, who understood her well, “an old man sitting in a chair, and leaning sorrowfully on the back, with his face resting on his hand. As if his child should comfort him, Bertha.”

“Yes, yes. She will. Go on.”

“He is an old man worn with care and work. He is a spare, dejected, thoughtful, gray-haired man. I see him now, despondent and bowed down, and striving against nothing. But, Bertha, I have seen him many times

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before, and striving hard in many ways for one great sacred object. And I honor his gray head, and bless him ! ”

The Blind Girl broke away from her; and throwing herself upon her knees before him, took the gray head to her breast.

“ It is my sight restored. It is my sight ! ” she cried. “ I have been blind, and now my eyes are open. I never knew him ! To think I might have died, and never truly seen the father who has been so loving to me ! ”

There were no words for Caleb’s emotion.

“ There is not a gallant figure on this earth,” exclaimed the Blind Girl, holding him in her embrace, “ that I would love so dearly, and would cherish so devotedly, as this ! The grayer, and more worn, the dearer, father ! Never let them say I am blind again. There’s not a furrow in his face, there’s not a hair upon his head, that shall be forgotten in my prayers and thanks to Heaven ! ”

Caleb managed to articulate “ My Bertha ! ”

“ And in my blindness, I believed him,” said the girl caressing him with tears of exquisite affection, “ to be so different ! And having him beside me, day by day, so mindful of me always, never dreamed of this ! ”

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"The fresh, smart father in the blue coat, Bertha," said poor Caleb. "He's gone!"

"Nothing is gone," she answered. "Dearest father, no! Everything is here—in you. The father that I loved so well; the father that I never loved enough, and never knew; the benefactor whom I first began to reverence and love, because he had such sympathy for me; all are here in you. Nothing is dead to me. The soul of all that was most dear to me is here—here, with the worn face, and the gray head. And I am NOT blind, father, any longer!"

Dot's whole attention had been concentrated, during this discourse, upon the father and daughter; but looking, now, towards the little Haymaker in the Moorish meadow, she saw the clock was within a few minutes of striking, and fell immediately, into a nervous and excited state.

"Father," said Bertha, hesitating, "Mary."

"Yes my dear," returned Caleb. "Here she is."

"There is no change in *her*. You never told me anything of *her* that was not true?"

"I should have done it my dear, I am

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afraid," returned Caleb, "if I could have made her better than she was. But I must have changed her for the worse, if I had changed her at all. Nothing could improve her, Bertha."

Confident as the Blind Girl had been when she asked the question, her delight and pride in the reply and her renewed embrace of Dot, were charming to behold.

"More changes than you think for, may happen though, my dear," said Dot. "Changes for the better, I mean; changes for great joy to some of us. You mustn't let them startle you too much, if any such should ever happen, and affect you? Are those wheels upon the road? You've a quick ear, Bertha. Are they wheels?"

"Yes. Coming very fast."

"I—I—I know you have a quick ear," said Dot, placing her hand upon her heart, and evidently talking on, as fast as she could, to hide its palpitating state, "because I have noticed it often, and because you were so quick to find out that strange step last night. Though why you should have said, as I very well recollect you did say, Bertha, 'Whose step is that!' and why you should

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have taken any greater observation of it than of any other step, I don't know. Though as I said just now, there are great changes in the world: great changes: and we can't do better than prepare ourselves to be surprised at hardly anything."

Caleb wondered what this meant; perceiving that, she spoke to him no less than to his daughter. He saw her, with astonishment, so fluttered and distressed that she could scarcely breathe; and holding to a chair, to save herself from falling.

"They are wheels indeed!" she panted. "Coming nearer! Nearer! Very close! And now you hear them stopping at the garden-gate! And now you hear a step outside the door—the same step, Bertha, is it not!—and now!"—

She uttered a wild cry of uncontrollable delight; and running up to Caleb put her hands upon his eyes, as a young man rushed into the room, and flinging away his hat in the air, came sweeping down upon them.

"Is it over?" cried Dot.

"Yes."

"Happily over?"

"Yes!"

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“Do you recollect the voice, dear Caleb? Did you ever hear the like of it before?” cried Dot.

“If my boy in the Golden South Americas was alive”—said Caleb, trembling.

“He is alive!” shrieked Dot, removing her hands from his eyes, and clapping them in ecstasy; “look at him! See where he stands before you, healthy and strong! Your own dear son! Your own dear living, loving brother, Bertha!”

All honor to the little creature for her transports! All honor to her tears and laughter, when the three were locked in one another’s arms! All honor to the heartiness with which she met the sunburnt sailor-fellow, with his dark streaming hair, half way, and never turned her rosy little mouth aside, but suffered him to kiss it, freely, and to press her to his bounding heart!

And honor to the Cuckoo too—why not!—for bursting out of the trap-door in the Moorish Palace like a housebreaker, and hiccoughing twelve times on the assembled company, as if he had got drunk for joy! The Carrier, entering, started back. And well he might, to find himself in such good company.

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“Look, John!” said Caleb, exultingly, “look here! My own boy from the Golden South Americas! My own son! Him that you fitted out, and sent away yourself! Him that you were always such a friend to!”

The Carrier advanced to seize him by the hand; but, recoiling, as some feature in his face awakened a remembrance of the Deaf Man in the Cart, said:

“Edward! Was it you?”

“Now tell him all!” cried Dot. “Tell him all, Edward; and don’t spare me, for nothing shall make me spare myself in his eyes, ever again.”

“I was the man,” said Edward.

“And could you steal, disguised, into the house of your old friend?” rejoined the Carrier. “There was a frank boy once—how many years is it, Caleb, since we heard that he was dead, and had it proved, we thought?—who never would have done that.”

“There was a generous friend of mine, once; more a father to me than a friend;” said Edward, “who never would have judged me, or any other man, unheard. You were he. So I am certain you will hear me now.”

The Carrier, with a troubled glance at Dot,

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who still kept far away from him, replied, "Well! that's but fair. I will."

"You must know that when I left here, a boy," said Edward, "I was in love, and my love was returned. She was a very young girl, who perhaps (you may tell me) didn't know her own mind. But I knew mine, and I had a passion for her."

"You had!" exclaimed the Carrier. "You!"

"Indeed I had," returned the other. "And she returned it. I have ever since believed she did, and I am sure she did."

"Heaven help me!" said the Carrier. "This is worse than all."

"Constant to her," said Edward, "and returning, full of hope, after many hardships and perils, to redeem my part of our old contract, I heard, twenty miles away, that she was false to me; that she had forgotten me; and had bestowed herself upon another and a richer man. I had no mind to reproach her; but I wished to see her, and to prove beyond dispute that this was true. I hoped she might have been forced into it, against her own desire and recollection. It would be small comfort, but it would be some, I thought, and on I came. That I might have the truth, the real

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truth; observing freely for myself, and judging for myself, without obstruction on the one hand, or presenting my own influence (if I had any) before her, on the other; I dressed myself—unlike myself—you know how; and waited on the road—you know where. You had no suspicion of me; neither had—had she,” pointing to Dot, “until I whispered in her ear at that fireside, and she so nearly betrayed me.”

“But when she knew that Edward was alive, and had come back,” sobbed Dot, now speaking for herself, as she had burned to do all through this narrative: “and when she knew his purpose, she advised him by all means to keep his secret close; for his old friend John Peerybingle was much too open in his nature, and too clumsy in all artifice—being a clumsy man in general,” said Dot, half laughing and half crying—“to keep it for him. And when she—that’s me, John,” sobbed the little woman—“told him all, and how his sweet-heart had believed him to be dead; and how she had at last been over-persuaded by her mother into a marriage which the silly, dear old thing called advantageous; and when she—that’s me again, John—told him they were not

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yet married (though close upon it), and that it would be nothing but a sacrifice if it went on, for there was no love on her side; and when he went nearly mad with joy to hear it; then she — that's me again — said she would go between them, as she had often done before in old times, John, and would sound his sweetheart and be sure that what she — me again, John — said and thought was right. And it was right, John! And they were brought together, John! And they were married, John, an hour ago! And here's the Bride! And Gruff and Tackleton may die a bachelor! And I'm a happy little woman. May, God bless you!"

She was an irresistible little woman, if that be anything to the purpose; and never so completely irresistible as in her present transports. There never were congratulations so endearing and delicious, as those she lavished on herself and on the Bride.

Amid the tumult of emotions in his breast, the honest Carrier had stood, confounded. Flying, now, towards her, Dot stretched out her hand to stop him, and retreated as before.

"No, John, no! Hear all! Don't love me any more, John, till you've heard every

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word I have to say. It was wrong to have a secret from you, John. I'm very sorry. I didn't think it any harm, till I came and sat down by you on the little stool last night. But when I knew by what was written in your face, that you had seen me walking in the gallery with Edward, and when I knew what you thought, I felt how giddy and how wrong it was. But oh, dear John, how could you, could you, think so!"

Little woman, how she sobbed again! John Peerybingle would have caught her in his arms. But no; she wouldn't let him.

"Don't you love me yet, please John! Not for a long time yet! When I was sad about this intended marriage, dear, it was because I remembered May and Edward such young lovers; and knew that her heart was far away from Tackleton. You believe that, now. Don't you John?"

John was going to make another rush at this appeal; but she stopped him again.

"No; keep there, please John! When I laugh at you, as I sometimes do, John, and call you clumsy and a dear old goose, and names of that sort, it's because I love you John, so well, and take such pleasure in your

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ways, and wouldn't see you altered in the least respect to have you made a King to-morrow."

"Hooroar!" said Caleb, with unusual vigor. "My opinion!"

"And when I speak of people being middle-aged, and steady, John, and pretend that we are a humdrum couple, going on in a jog-trot sort of a way, it's only because I'm such a silly little thing, John, that I like, sometimes, to act a kind of Play with Baby, and all that: and make believe."

She saw that he was coming; and stopped him again. But she was very nearly too late.

"No, don't love me for another minute or two, if you please John! What I want most to tell you, I have kept to the last. My dear, good, generous John, when we were talking the other night about the Cricket, I had it on my lips to say, that at first I did not love you quite so dearly as I do now; that when I first came home here, I was half afraid I mightn't learn to love you every bit as well as I hoped and prayed I might—being so very young, John! But, dear John, every day and hour I loved you more and more. And if I could have loved you better than I do, the noble

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words I heard you say this morning would have made me. But I can't. All the affection that I had (it was a great deal John) I gave you, as you well deserve, long, long ago and I have no more left to give. Now, my dear husband, take me to your heart again! That's my home, John; and never, never think of sending me to any other!"

You never will derive so much delight from seeing a glorious little woman in the arms of a third party, as you would have felt if you had seen Dot run into the Carrier's embrace. It was the most complete, unmitigated, soul-fraught little piece of earnestness that ever you beheld in all your days.

You may be sure the Carrier was in a state of perfect rapture; and you may be sure Dot was likewise; and you may be sure they all were, inclusive of Miss Slowboy, who wept copiously for joy, and wishing to include her young charge in the general interchange of congratulations, handed round the Baby to everybody in succession, as if it were something to drink.

But, now, the sound of wheels was heard again outside the door; and somebody exclaimed that Gruff and Tackleton was coming

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back. Speedily that worthy gentleman appeared, looking warm and flustered.

“Why, what the Devil’s this, John Peerybingle!” said Tackleton. “There’s some mistake, I appointed Mrs. Tackleton to meet me at the church, and I’ll swear I passed her on the road, on her way here. Oh! here she is! I beg your pardon, sir; I haven’t the pleasure of knowing you; but if you can do me the favor to spare this young lady, she has rather a particular engagement this morning.”

“But I can’t spare her,” returned Edward. “I couldn’t think of it.”

“What do you mean, you vagabond?” said Tackleton.

“I mean, that as I can make allowance for your being vexed,” returned the other with a smile, “I am as deaf to harsh discourse this morning, as I was to all discourse last night.”

The look that Tackleton bestowed upon him, and the start he gave!

“I am sorry, sir,” said Edward, holding out May’s left hand and especially the third finger; “that the young lady can’t accompany you to church; but as she has been there once, this morning, perhaps you’ll excuse her.”

Tackleton looked hard at the third finger,

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and took a little piece of silver paper, apparently containing a ring, from his waistcoat-pocket.

"Miss Slowboy," said Tackleton, "will you have the kindness to throw that in the fire? Thank'ee."

"It was a previous engagement, quite an old engagement, that prevented my wife from keeping her appointment with you, I assure you," said Edward.

"Mr. Tackleton will do me the justice to acknowledge that I revealed it to him faithfully, and that I told him, many times, I never could forget it," said May, blushing.

"Oh certainly!" said Tackleton. "Oh to be sure. Oh it's all right. It's quite correct. Mrs. Edward Plummer, I infer?"

"That's the name," returned the bridegroom.

"Ah, I shouldn't have known you sir," said Tackleton, scrutinizing his face narrowly, and making a low bow. "I give you joy sir!"

"Thank'ee."

"Mrs. Peerybingle," said Tackleton, turning suddenly to where she stood with her husband; "I am sorry. You haven't done me a very

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great kindness, but upon my life I am sorry. You are better than I thought you. John Peerybingle, I am sorry. You understand me; that's enough. It's quite correct, ladies and gentlemen all, and perfectly satisfactory. Good-morning ! ”

With these words he carried it off, and carried himself off too: merely stopping at the door, to take the flowers and favors from his horse's head, and to kick that animal once, in the ribs, as a means of informing him that there was a screw loose in his arrangements.

Of course it became a serious duty now, to make such a day of it, as should mark these events for a high Feast and Festival in the Peerybingle Calendar for evermore. Accordingly, Dot went to work to produce such an entertainment, as should reflect undying honor on the house and on every one concerned; and in a very short space of time, she was up to her dimpled elbows in flour, and whitening the Carrier's coat, every time he came near her, by stopping him to give him a kiss. That good fellow washed the greens, and peeled the turnips, and broke the plates, and upset iron pots full of cold water on the fire, and made himself useful in all sorts of ways: while

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a couple of professional assistants, hastily called in from somewhere in the neighborhood, as on a point of life or death, ran against each other in all the doorways and round all the corners, and everybody tumbled over Tilly Slowboy and the Baby, everywhere. Tilly never came out in such force before. Her ubiquity was the theme of general admiration. She was a stumbling-block in the passage at five-and-twenty minutes past two; a man-trap in the kitchen at half-past two precisely; and a pitfall in the garret at five-and-twenty minutes to three. The Baby's head was, as it were, a test and touchstone for every description of matter, — animal, vegetable, and mineral. Nothing was in use that day that didn't come, at some time or other, into close acquaintance with it.

Then there was a great Expedition set on foot to go and find out Mrs. Fielding; and to be dismally penitent to that excellent gentlewoman; and to bring her back, by force, if needful, to be happy and forgiving. And when the Expedition first discovered her, she would listen to no terms at all, but said, an unspeakable number of times, that ever she should have lived to see the day ! and couldn't

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be got to say anything else, except, "Now carry me to the grave:" which seemed absurd, on account of her not being dead, or anything at all like it. After a time, she lapsed into a state of dreadful calmness, and observed, that when that unfortunate train of circumstances had occurred in the Indigo Trade, she had foreseen that she would be exposed, during her whole life, to every species of insult and contumely; and that she was glad to find it was the case; and begged they wouldn't trouble themselves about her, — for what was she? oh, dear! a nobody! — but would forget that such a being lived, and would take their course in life without her. From this bitterly sarcastic mood, she passed into an angry one, in which she gave vent to the remarkable expression that the worm would turn if trodden on; and, after that, she yielded to a soft regret, and said, if they had only given her their confidence, what might she not have had it in her power to suggest! Taking advantage of this crisis in her feelings, the Expedition embraced her; and she very soon had her gloves on, and was on her way to John Peerybingle's in a state of unimpeachable gentility; with a paper parcel at her side containing a cap of

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state, almost as tall, and quite as stiff, as a mitre.

Then, there were Dot's father and mother to come, in another little chaise; and they were behind their time; and fears were entertained; and there was much looking out for them down the road; and Mrs. Fielding always would look in the wrong and morally impossible directions; and being apprised thereof, hoped she might take the liberty of looking where she pleased. At last they came: a chubby little couple jogging along in a snug and comfortable little way that quite belonged to the Dot family; and Dot and her mother, side by side, were wonderful to see. They were so like each other.

Then, Dot's mother had to renew her acquaintance with May's mother; and May's mother always stood on her gentility; and Dot's mother never stood on anything but her active little feet. And old Dot—so to call Dot's father, I forgot it wasn't his right name, but never mind—took liberties and shook hands at first sight, and seemed to think a cap but so much starch and muslin, and didn't defer himself at all to the Indigo Trade, but said there was no help for it now; and, in

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Mrs. Fielding's summing up, was a good-natured kind of man — but coarse, my dear.

I wouldn't have missed Dot, doing the honors in her wedding-gown, my benison on her bright face! for any money. No! nor the good Carrier, so jovial and so ruddy, at the bottom of the table. Nor the brown, fresh sailor-fellow, and his handsome wife. Nor any one among them. To have missed the dinner would have been to miss as jolly and as stout a meal as man need eat; and to have missed the overflowing cups in which they drank The Wedding-Day, would have been the greatest miss of all.

After dinner, Caleb sang the song about the Sparkling Bowl. As I'm a living man, hoping to keep so, for a year or two, he sang it through.

And, by the by, a most unlooked-for incident occurred, just as he finished the last verse.

There was a tap at the door; and a man came staggering in, without saying with your leave, or by your leave, with something heavy on his head. Setting this down in the middle of the table, symmetrically in the centre of the nuts and apples, he said :

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“Mr. Tackleton’s compliments, and as he hasn’t got no use for the cake himself, p’raps you’ll eat it.”

And with those words, he walked off.

There was some surprise among the company, as you may imagine. Mrs. Fielding, being a lady of infinite discernment, suggested that the cake was poisoned, and related a narrative of a cake, which, within her knowledge, had turned a seminary for young ladies, blue. But she was overruled by acclamation; and the cake was cut by May, with much ceremony and rejoicing.

I don’t think any one had tasted it, when there came another tap at the door, and the same man appeared again, having under his arm a vast brown paper parcel.

“Mr. Tackleton’s compliments, and he’d sent a few toys for the Babby. They an’t ugly.”

After the delivery of which expressions, he retired again.

The whole company would have experienced great difficulty in finding words for their astonishment, even if they had had ample time to seek them. But, they had none at all; for, the messenger had scarcely shut the door

The Cricket on the Hearth

behind him, when there came another tap, and Tackleton himself walked in.

“Mrs. Peerybingle!” said the Toy-merchant, hat in hand. “I’m sorry. I’m more sorry than I was this morning. I have had time to think of it. John Peerybingle! I’m sour by disposition; but I can’t help being sweetened, more or less, by coming face to face with such a man as you. Caleb! This unconscious little nurse gave me a broken hint last night, of which I have found the thread. I blush to think how easily I might have bound you and your daughter to me, and what a miserable idiot I was, when I took her for one! Friends, one and all, my house is very lonely to-night. I have not so much as a Cricket on my Hearth. I have scared them all away. Be gracious to me; let me join this happy party!”

He was at home in five minutes. You never saw such a fellow. What *had* he been doing with himself all his life, never to have known, before, his great capacity of being jovial! Or what had the Fairies been doing with him, to have effected such a change!

“John! you won’t send me home this evening; will you?” whispered Dot.

The Cricket on the Hearth

He had been very near it though !

There wanted but one living creature to make the party complete; and, in the twinkling of an eye, there he was, very thirsty with hard running, and engaged in hopeless endeavors to squeeze his head into a narrow pitcher. He had gone with the cart to its journey's end, very much disgusted with the absence of his master, and stupendously rebellious to the Deputy. After lingering about the stable for some little time, vainly attempting to incite the old horse to the mutinous act of returning on his own account, he had walked into the taproom and laid himself down before the fire. But suddenly yielding to the conviction that the Deputy was a humbug, and must be abandoned, he had got up again, turned tail, and come home.

There was a dance in the evening. With which general mention of that recreation, I should have left it alone, if I had not some reason to suppose that it was quite an original dance, and one of a most uncommon figure. It was formed in an odd way; in this way.

Edward, that sailor-fellow — a good, free, dashing sort of a fellow he was — had been telling them various marvels concerning par-

The Cricket on the Hearth

rots, and mines, and Mexicans, and gold dust, when all at once he took it in his head to jump up from his seat and propose a dance; for Bertha's harp was there, and she had such a hand upon it as you seldom hear. Dot (sly little piece of affectation when she chose) said her dancing days were over; I think because the Carrier was smoking his pipe, and she liked sitting by him, best. Mrs. Fielding had no choice, of course, but to say *her* dancing days were over, after that; and everybody said the same, except May; May was ready.

So, May and Edward get up, amid great applause, to dance alone; and Bertha plays her liveliest tune.

Well! if you'll believe me, they have not been dancing five minutes, when suddenly the Carrier flings his pipe away, takes Dot round the waist, dashes out into the room, and starts off with her, toe and heel, quite wonderfully. Tackleton no sooner sees this, than he skims across to Mrs. Fielding, takes her round the waist, and follows suit. Old Dot no sooner sees this, than up he is, all alive, whisks off Mrs. Dot in the middle of the dance, and is the foremost there. Caleb no sooner sees this, than he clutches Tilly Slowboy by both

The Cricket on the Hearth

hands and goes off at score; Miss Slowboy, firm in the belief that diving hotly in among the other couples, and effecting any number of concussions with them, is your only principle of footing it.

Hark ! how the Cricket joins the music with its Chirp, Chirp, Chirp; and how the Kettle hums !

.

But what is this ! Even as I listen to them, blithely, and turn towards Dot, for one last glimpse of a little figure very pleasant to me, she and the rest have vanished into air, and I am left alone. A Cricket sings upon the Hearth; a broken child's-toy lies upon the ground; and nothing else remains.

Descriptive Power

1. The first step in the process is to identify the problem or issue that needs to be addressed. This involves gathering information and understanding the context of the problem.

Descriptive Power

The power to make a reader see before him the pictured images in an author's mind is not possessed equally by all writers. It is a power so dependent upon certain intellectual qualities that when those qualities are lacking or feebly developed the writing will lack vividness and pictorial effect. If a person lacks close and accurate observation, his power of description cannot be great, for having never seen things accurately he has not the material with which to construct his pictures. A vivid imagination will not avail unless it has in control a host of little things observed and ready for new arrangement and combination. In *The Cricket on the Hearth* there is this paragraph descriptive of Boxer's hilarity:

“Then, Boxer gave occasion to more good natured recognition of, and by, the Carrier, than half a dozen Christians could have done ! Everybody knew him, all along the road, especially the fowls and pigs, who when they saw him approaching, with his body all on one side, and his ears pricked up inquisitively, and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air, immediately withdrew into remote back settlements, without waiting for the honor of a nearer acquaintance. He had business everywhere ; going down all the

Descriptive Power

turnings, looking into all the wells, bolting in and out of the cottages, dashing into the midst of all the Dame-Schools, fluttering all the pigeons, magnifying the tails of all the cats, and trotting into the public houses like a regular customer. Wherever he went, somebody or other might have been heard to cry, 'Halloa ! Here's Boxer !' and out came that somebody forthwith, accompanied by at least two or three other somebodies, to give John Peerybingle and his pretty wife, Good Day."

Notice some of the points of particular and unusually close observation: "With his body all on one side and his ears pricked up inquisitively, and that knob of a tail making the most of itself in the air"; "He had business everywhere"; "Magnifying the tails of the cats." These and other minor phrases show that Dickens had critically observed the movement of some joyful, racing dog, and the consternation he created in the world of lesser animals.

But not only had he the power of seeing accurately, he was able to seize upon the salient features of each thing and act. It was the fluttering of the pigeons, the magnified tail of the cat, the hasty retreat of the fowls and pigs and other startling things that he used to make up the picture of the excited Boxer.

He must have been able to see clearly, and to grasp salient points readily, but he must have had also a retentive memory to have held these im-

Descriptive Power

pressions and a marked ability to recall these facts of the mind at will. Something like this then is the psychological history of the paragraph: Dickens had seen racing dogs; his attention was attracted by them; he noted striking facts of the race. He retained these facts in his mind till he had need of a rampant Boxer and then recalled and clothed them in his own inimitable phraseology.

Find the description of the ride through the fog and see if you detect evidence of the same process. What phrases show keen observation? What were the Fairy Rings? Did you ever see them? Would they be conspicuous through a fog? Would the trees *start* out of the mist abruptly? If so, why should they *glide* away? Is fire *white* in the daytime? Is it the fog that makes *here and there a dash of red in it*? Do you think he has selected conspicuous things in the fog scenery? Is the picture as clear as the one of Boxer? Have you seen a hilarious dog on such a rampage? Did you ever ride through a fog? Would your own experience have anything to do with the clearness of your picture? Find in this story and elsewhere in this course a number of descriptive passages and search for evidences of minute and unusual powers of observation. Does this power seem to vary in different authors?

In the second stanza of *The Cotter's Saturday Night* the close of a winter day is described by the

Descriptive Power

enumeration of a few particulars which suggest to us a vivid picture. We hear the angry moan of a chill wind blowing at the close of a short northern day. We see the oxen covered with mud from their weary round at the plow, slowly going from their toil, the crows flying in flocks to their nightly roost, and the weary cottager, his exhausting labor over, collecting his tools that he may spend the Sabbath at ease and at rest. The poet has really said little but he has gathered those noteworthy facts that appeal to our imagination. Every line suggests darkness closing over a wearisome day, and exhausting toil relieved only by the thought of a night of slumber and a day of rest. It is a different picture from that which Gray calls up in his elegy when "all the air a solemn stillness holds" and "drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds." The two poets each intent upon his own imaginings have given to their descriptions an emotional tone as distinct and as different as though there were no possible likeness in the materials they use. In poetry, more frequently than in prose, the author rouses by suggestive words a train of emotions that make the detailed realistic descriptions pale in comparison with the brilliant pictures we create for ourselves. No study of the descriptive power would be complete without a full recognition of this emotional phase. We can paint with the coloring of our own imagination more brilliant and lasting pictures than the most intel-

Descriptive Power

lectual writer can depict for us be he ever so minute and accurate.

When Burns says :

“Th’ expectant wee-things, toddlin’, stacher thro’
To meet their dad, wi’ flichterin’ noise and
glee,”

we need no more details. He has caught our sympathy and we people that simple fireside with little children as real and as lifelike as those who have at some time brightened our own homes.

“The mother wi’ her needle an’ her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel’s the new.”

What is there in those two lines to give us such a charming picture of devoted and industrious motherhood? It is the surpassing genius of the poet, whose own feelings are as delicately attuned as those of his most sensitive hearers. Just why it is so or how it is done we cannot tell.

“The youngster’s artless heart o’erflows wi’ joy,
But blate and laithfu’, scarce can weel behave.”

Burns has observed such a strapping youth, so honest and so embarrassed, and, his own heart keenly sympathetic, makes us at once the considerate friends of the bashful youth. Through the whole poem he makes us feel his earnestness and sincerity and leaves us finally the warm admirers of this simple peasant family. What he says we take seriously and wherever he sketches an outline for us we fill it in with the royal colors of truth.

Descriptive Power

But does not Dickens reach the same end? Do you not as distinctly see the little hearth about which John and Mary Peerybingle sat with the Baby? And do you not feel as keenly the startling integrity of John, the absolute devotion of Caleb to his blind daughter? And yet in how different a manner is the result brought about! Dickens sees everything with his fun-loving eyes and when he tells anything it is usually with a fillip of humor that piques our curiosity, entertains us with its playful turns, but leaves us finally with a serious thought somewhere. Even in that awful night vigil when John sat by the fire, the gun upon the wall and the helpless stranger in the adjacent room, even then, with the Cricket struggling to chirp away the murderous thoughts that fought for mastery in the Carrier's breast, Dickens could not wholly restrain his whimsical ideas but must picture Dot "nodding to her would-be partners, one by one, as they passed, but with a comical indifference, enough to make them go down themselves immediately if they were her admirers—and they must have been so more or less; they couldn't help it." But when the whole idea is a happy and cheerful one his radiant spirit fairly overflows:

"She was, out and out, the very best filler of a pipe, I should say, in the four quarters of the globe. To see her put that chubby little finger in the bowl and then blow down the pipe to clear the tube, and, when she had done so, affect to think

Descriptive Power

that there was really something in the tube, and blow a dozen times, and hold it to her eye like a telescope with a most provoking little twist in her capital little face, as she looked down it, was quite a brilliant thing. As to the tobacco, she was perfect mistress of the subject; and her lighting of the pipe, with a wisp of paper, when the Carrier had it in his mouth — going so very near his nose, and yet not scorching it — was Art, high Art."

As one becomes better acquainted with literature, he sees through what different media its makers have looked. Shelley's melancholy forebodings, Burns's faith in the brotherhood of man, Dickens's gayety, Wordsworth's simplicity of spirit and Pope's respect for exactness and propriety, color the descriptions of each and tinge their work with characteristics easily recognized by the student.

Gather numerous bits of description and compare them, noting as far as possible their peculiarities and the sources of their power. Are they plain, matter of fact, and filled with minutiae acquired only by the closest observation or do they fix your imagination by their suggestiveness?

Do you find some poems containing little or no description? Could you classify the poems you have read as those intended to make pictures of things and acts and those intended to be philosophic or emotional? Are there poems that stand between the two classes, in some of which the emotions are called upon to aid the mind in

Descriptive Power

picturing, while in others the pictures stir our emotions to activity ?

This description by Browning of the face of a beautiful young girl is remarkable for its skillful and delicate word painting:

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers !
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile ; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burthen of honey-colored buds, to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver, on the pale gold ground,
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts !
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb :
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momentarily
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
(That's the pale ground you'd see this sweet face
by),
All heaven, meanwhile condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

ROBERT BURNS

7/2/21

The Cotter's Saturday Night

INSCRIBED TO R. AIKIN, ESQ.¹

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor.

GRAY.

My lov'd, my honour'd, much respected friend !
No mercenary bard his homage pays :
With honest pride I scorn each selfish end ;
My dearest meed, a friend's esteem and
praise :
To you I sing, in simple Scottish lays,
The lowly train in life's sequester'd scene ;
The native feelings strong, the guileless ways ;
What Aikin in a cottage would have been :
Ah ! tho' his worth unknown, far happier
there, I ween.

I.

November chill blows loud wi' angry sugh :²
The short'ning winter day is near a close ;
The miry beasts retreating frae³ the plough ;⁴

1. A solicitor friend residing at Ayr.

2. Sough.

3. From.

4. Plow.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

The black'ning trains o' craws to their repose :
The toil-worn cotter frae his labour goes,
This night his weekly moil⁶ is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

II.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree :
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin', stacher⁶
thro'
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin' noise an' glee.
His wee bit ingle, blinkin' bonnily,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary, carking ⁷cares beguile,
An' makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

III.

Belyve,⁸ the elder bairns come drappin' in,
At service out, amang the farmers roun':

5. Drudgery.

6. Stagger.

7. Trying.

8. Soon.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

Some ca' ⁹ the pleugh, some herd, some
tentie ¹⁰ rin

A cannie ¹¹ errand to a neebor town :

Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparklin' in her
e'e,

Comes hame, perhaps, to show a braw new
gown,

Or deposit her sair-won ¹² penny fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hard-
ship be.

IV.

Wi' joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
And each for other's weelfare kindly spiers: ¹³
The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnoticed
fleet :

Each tells the uncoss ¹⁴ that he sees or
hears ;

The parents, partial, eye their hopeful
years ;

Anticipation forward points the view ;
The mother, wi' her needle an' her shears,
Gars ¹⁵ auld claes look amaisht as weel's
the new ; —

The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

9. Drive.

12. Hard-won.

10. Carefully.

13. Enquires.

15. Makes.

11. Trustworthy.

14. News.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

V.

Their master's an' their mistress's command,
The younkers a' are warned to obey :
"An' mind their labours wi' an eydent¹⁶ hand,
An' ne'er, tho' out o' sight, to jauk or play :
An' O ! be sure to fear the Lord alway !
An' mind your duty, duly, morn an' night !
Lest in temptation's path ye gang astray,
Implore his counsel and assisting might :
They never sought in vain, that sought the
Lord aright !"

VI.

But hark ! a rap comes gently to the door ;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the
same,
Tells how a neebor lad cam' o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her
cheek ;
With heart-struck, anxious care, inquires
his name,
While Jenny hafflins¹⁷ is afraid to speak ;

¹⁶. Diligent.

¹⁷. Partly.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

Weel pleas'd the mother hears, it's nae wild,
worthless rake.

VII.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben :¹⁸
A strappin' youth ; he tak's the mother's
eye ;
Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en ;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and
kye.¹⁹
The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi'
joy,
But blate²⁰ and laithfu',²¹ scarce can weel
behave ;
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae
grave ;
Weel pleas'd to think her bairn's respected
like the lave.²²

VIII.

O happy love ! where love like this is found !
O heart-felt raptures ! — bliss beyond com-
pare !

18. Into the room.

19. Cattle.

20. Modest.

21. Bashful.

22. Others. That is, her neighbors' girls.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,
And sage experience bids me this declare—
“ If heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure
spare,
One cordial in this melancholy vale,
'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair,
In other's arms, breathe out the tender tale,
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the
ev'ning gale.”

IX.

Is there, in human form, that bears a heart—
A wretch ! a villain ! lost to love and truth !
That can, with studied, sly, ensnaring art,
Betray sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth ?
Curse on his perjur'd arts ! dissembling smooth !
Are honour, virtue, conscience, all exil'd ?
Is there no pity, no relenting ruth,
Points to the parents fondling o'er their
child ?
Then paints the ruin'd maid, and their distraction wild ?

X.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch,²³ chief o' Scotia's
food :
The sowpe²⁴ their only Hawkie²⁵ does afford,

²³. Wholesome porridge of oatmeal.

²⁴. Little quantity of milk, here.

²⁵. White-faced cow,

The Cotter's Saturday Night

That 'yont the hallan²⁶ snugly chows her
cood ;
The dame brings forth in complimentary mood
To grace the lad, her weel-hain'd²⁷ kebbuck²⁸
fell —
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid ;
The frugal wife, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond²⁹ auld, sin' lint was i'
the bell.³⁰

XI.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide ;
The sire turns o'er, wi' patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible,³¹ ance his father's pride ;
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart³² haffets³³ wearing thin an' bare ;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales³⁴ a portion with judicious care ;
And " Let us worship God ! " he says, with
solemn air.

26. Partition.

27. Carefully preserved.

28. Cheese.

29. A year — twelvemonth.

30. Since flax was in blossom.

31. Family Bible that was kept in the ha', the best room,

32. Gray.

33. Temples,

34. Chooses,

The Cotter's Saturday Night

XII.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise ;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest
aim :

Perhaps Dundee's³⁵ wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs,³⁶ worthy of the name,
Or noble Elgin³⁵ beats³⁶ the heav'nward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays :
Compared with these, Italian trills are tame ;
The tickl'd ears no heart-felt raptures raise ;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

XIII.

The priest-like father reads the sacred page,
How Abram was the friend of God on high ;
Or, Moses bade eternal warfare wage
With Amalek's ungracious progeny ;
Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
Beneath the stroke of Heav'n's avenging ire ;
Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry ;
Or rapt Isaiah's wild, seraphic fire ;
Or other holy seers that tune the sacred lyre.

XIV.

Perhaps the Christian volume is the theme,
How guiltless blood for guilty man was shed ;

³⁵. Scotch psalm tunes.

³⁶. Increases.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

How He, who bore in heaven the second name,
Had not on earth whereon to lay his head;
How his first followers and servants sped;
The precepts sage they wrote to many a land:
How *he*,³⁷ who lone in Patmos banishèd,
Saw in the sun a mighty angel stand,
And heard great Bab'lon's doom pronounc'd
by Heaven's command.

XV.

Then kneeling down, to Heaven's Eternal
King,
The saint, the father, and the husband prays:
Hope "springs exulting on triumphant wing,"
That thus they all shall meet in future days³⁸
There ever bask in uncreated rays,
No more to sigh, or shed the bitter tear,
Together hymning their Creator's praise,
In such society, yet still more dear;
While circling time moves round in an eternal
sphere.

XVI.

Compar'd with this, how poor Religion's pride,
In all the pomp of method and of art,
When men display to congregations wide,
Devotion's ev'ry grace, except the heart!

37. John, the Evangelist.

38. Pope.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

The Pow'r, incensed, the pageant will desert,
The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole ;
But, haply, in some cottage far apart,
May hear, well pleased, the language of the
soul ;
And in the book of life the inmates poor enroll.

XVII.

Then homeward all take off their sev'ral way ;
The youngling cottagers retire to rest :
The parent-pair their secret homage pay,
And proffer up to Heaven the warm request,
That He, who stills the raven's clam'rous nest,
And decks the lily fair in flow'ry pride,
Would, in the way his wisdom sees the best,
For them and for their little ones provide ;
But, chiefly, in their hearts with grace divine
preside.

XVIII.

From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur
springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd
abroad :
Princes and lords are but the breath of kings,
" An honest man's the noblest work of God :"
And certes,³⁹ in fair virtue's heavenly road,
The cottage leaves the palace far behind ;

39. Certainly.

The Götter's Saturday Night

What is a lordling's pomp? — a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind,
Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refin'd !

XIX.

O Scotia ! my dear, my native soil !
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is
sent !
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be bless'd with health, and peace, and sweet
content !
And, O ! may Heaven their simple lives pre-
vent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much-
lov'd isle.

XX.

O Thou ! who poured the patriotic tide
That stream'd thro' Wallace's⁴⁰ undaunted
heart,
Who dared to nobly stem tyrannic pride,
Or nobly die, the second glorious part :
(The patriot's God peculiarly thou art,

⁴⁰. The national hero of Scotland who partially liberated his country from the rule of England but was finally defeated and executed in London in 1305.

The Cotter's Saturday Night

His friend, inspirer, guardian, and reward !)
O never, never, Scotia's realm desert ;
But still the patriot, and the patriot bard,
In bright succession raise, her ornament and
guard !

The Deserted Village

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

The Deserted Village

Sweet Auburn ! ¹ loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring
 swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed:
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could
 please,
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene !
How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topt the neighboring
 hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the
 shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made !
How often have I blessed the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train, from labor free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,

1. This is usually supposed to be the village of Lissoy where Henry Goldsmith, the poet's brother, was for many years the rector. Other commentators consider the town wholly imaginary.

The Deserted Village

While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending as the old surveyed ;
And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went
round :

And still, as each repeated pleasure tired,
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired ;
The dancing pair that simply sought renown
By holding out to tire each other down ;
The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter tittered round the place ;
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,
The matron's glance that would those looks
reprove.

These were thy charms, sweet village ! sports
like these,
With sweet succession, taught even toil to
please ;
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence
shed ;
These were thy charms — but all these charms
are fled.

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms with-
drawn ;
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant hand is seen,
And desolation saddens all thy green :

The Deserted Village

One only master grasps the whole domain,
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain.
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
But choked with sedges, works its weedy way ;
Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest ;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.
Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering
wall;
And, trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's
hand,
Far, far away, thy children leave the land.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay :
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade—
A breath can make them, as a breath has
made :
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

A time there was, ere England's griefs began,
When every rood of ground maintained its
man ;
For him light labor spread her wholesome
store,

The Deserted Village

Just gave what life required, but gave no more :
His best companion, innocence and health,
And his best riches ignorance of wealth.

But times are altered ; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain :
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose,
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose ;
And every want to luxury allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.
Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
Those calm desires that asked but little room,
Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,
Lived in each look, and brightened all the green ;
These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

Sweet Auburn ! parent of the blissful hour,
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.
Here, as I take my solitary rounds,
Amidst thy tangling walks and ruined grounds,
And, many a year elapsed, return to view
Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew,
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

The Deserted Village

In all my wand'rings round this world of
care,
In all my griefs — and God has given my
share —
I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown,
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down;
To husband out life's taper at the close,
And keep the flame from wasting by repose.
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned
skill,
Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw;
And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns
pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew,
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return — and die at home at last.

O blest retirement! friend to life's decline,
Retreats from care, that never must be mine,
How blest is he who crowns in shades like
these
A youth of labor with an age of ease;
Who quits a world where strong temptations
try,
And, since 'tis hard to combat, learns to fly!

The Deserted Village

For him no wretches, born to work and weep,
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous
 deep ;
Nor surly porter stands, in guilty state,
To turn imploring famine from the gate ;
But on he moves to meet his latter end,
Angels around befriending virtue's friend ;
Sinks to the grave with unperceived decay,
While resignation gently slopes the way ;
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past !

Sweet was the sound, when oft at evening's
 close
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose ;
There, as I passed with careless steps and
 slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below ;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young ;
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school ;
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whisper-
 ing wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind ;

These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.

The Deserted Village

But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread,
For all the blooming flush of life is fled.
All but yon widowed, solitary thing,
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;
She, wretched matron — forced in age, for
 bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses
 spread,
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn —
She only left of all the harmless train,
The sad historian of the pensive plain!

 Near yonder copse, where once the garden
 smiled,
And still where many a garden flower grows
 wild;
There, where a few torn shrubs the place
 disclose,
The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change
 his place;
Unpracticed he to fawn, or seek for power,

The Deserted Village

By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise.
His house was known to all the vagrant train,
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their
pain ;

The long-remembered beggar was his guest,
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims
allowed ;

The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
Sat by his fire, and talked the night away,
Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shouldered his crutch and showed how fields
were won.

Pleased with his guests, the good man learned
to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe ;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.

Thus to relieve the wretched, was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side ;
But in his duty, prompt at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all;
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,

The Deserted Village

He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismayed,
The reverend champion stood. At his control
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul ;
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to
raise,
And his last faltering accents whispered praise.

At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place ;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to
pray.

The service past, around the pious man,
With ready zeal, each honest rustic ran ;
E'en children followed, with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's
smile :

His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
Their welfare pleased him, and their cares
distressed ;

To them his heart, his love, his griefs were
given,

But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven :
As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,

The Deserted Village

Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the
storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are
spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the
way
With blossomed furze unprofitably gay —
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school ;
A man severe he was, and stern to view,
I knew him well, and every truant knew ;
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face ;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he ;
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned ;
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declared how much he knew ;
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too ;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides
presage,
And even the story ran that he could gauge.
In arguing, too, the parson owned his skill,
For e'en though vanquished, he could argue
still ;

The Deserted Village

While words of learned length and thund'ring
 sound
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around,
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head should carry all he knew.

But past is all his fame. The very spot,
Where many a time he triumphed, is forgot.
Near yonder thorn that lifts its head on high,
Where once the sign-post caught the passing
 eye,
Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts
 inspired,
Where gray-beard mirth and smiling toil
 retired,
Where village statesmen talked with looks
 profound,
And news much older than their ale went
 round.
Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlor splendors of that festive place ;
The white-washed wall, the nicely sanded floor,
The varnished clock that clicked behind the
 door ;
The chest contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day ;
The pictures placed for ornament and use,

The Deserted Village

The twelve good rules,² the roval game of
goose;³
The hearth, except when winter chilled the
day,
With aspen boughs, and flowers and fennel gay;
While broken teacups, wisely kept for show,
Ranged o'er the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain transitory splendors ! could not all
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall ?
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart
An hour's importance to the poor man's heart;
Thither no more the peasant shall repair
To sweet oblivion of his daily care;
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,
No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail ;
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,
Relax his ponderous strength and lean to hear ;
The host himself no longer shall be found
Careful to see the mantling bliss go round ;
Nor the coy maid, half-willing to be pressed,
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

Yes ! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
These simple blessings of the lowly train,
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,

2. Twelve rules relating to health, honesty, and domestic happiness,
said to have been written by Charles I.

3. A game played with dice.

The Deserted Village

One native charm, than all the gloss of art;
Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born
 sway :

Lightly they frolic o'er the vacant mind,
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.
But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade,
With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed,
In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,
The toiling pleasure sickens into pain;
And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy?

Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen who survey
The rich man's power increase, the poor's
 decay,

'Tis yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land.
Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted
 ore,

And shouting Folly hails them from the shore ;
Hoards even beyond the miser's wish abound,
And rich men flock from all the world around.
Yet count our gains : this wealth is but a name,
That leaves our useful products still the same.
Not so the loss. The man of wealth and
 pride

Takes up a space, that many poor supplied ;

The Deserted Village

Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds :
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken cloth
Has robb'd the neighboring fields of half their
growth ;

His seat, where solitary sports are seen,
Indignant spurns the cottage green ;
Around the world each needful product flies,
For all the luxuries the world supplies.
While thus the land, adorn'd for pleasure, all
In barren splendor feebly waits the fall.

As some fair female, unadorn'd and plain,
Secure to please while youth confirms her
reign,
Slights every borrowed charm that dress
supplies,
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes ;
But when those charms are past, for charms
are frail,
When time advances, and when lovers fail,
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
In all the glaring impotence of dress ;
Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed :
In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed,
But verging to decline, its splendors rise,
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise ;
While, scourged by famine, from the smiling
land

The Deserted Village

The mournful peasant leads his humble band ;
And while he sinks, without one arm to save,
The country blooms — a garden and a grave.

Where then, ah ! where shall poverty reside,
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride ?
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed
He drives his flocks to pick the scanty blade,
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth
divide,
And e'en the bare-worn common is denied.
If to the city sped — what waits him there ?
To see profusion that he must not share ;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
To pamper luxury and thin mankind ;
To see each joy the sons of pleasure know,
Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe ;
Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade,
There, the pale artist plies the sickly trade ;
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomps
display,
There, the black gibbet glooms beside the way.
The dome where pleasure holds her midnight
reign,
Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train ;
Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing
square,
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy ;

The Deserted Village

Sure these denote one universal joy !
Are these thy serious thoughts? — Ah ! turn
 thine eyes
Where the poor, houseless, shivering female
 lies.
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blessed,
Has wept at tales of innocence distressed ;
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn ;
Now lost to all; her friends, her virtue fled,
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head —
And, pinched with cold, and shrinking from
 the shower,
With heavy heart deplores that luckless hour,
When idly first, ambitious of the town,
She left her wheel and robes of country brown.

Do thine, sweet Auburn ! thine the loveliest
 train,
Do thy fair tribes participate her pain ?
E'en now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread.

Ah, no ! To distant climes, a dreary scene,
Where half the convex world intrudes between,
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they
 go,
Where wild Altama⁴ murmurs to their woe.

⁴. Altamaha.

The Deserted Village

Far different there from all that charmed
before,
The various terrors of that horrid shore;
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,
And fiercely shed intolerable day ;
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing ;
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling ;
Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance
crowned,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around ;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake ;
Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey,
And savage men more murderous still than
they ;
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.
Far different these from every former scene,
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.

Good Heaven ! what sorrows gloomed that
parting day,
That called them from their native walks away ;
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked
their last —

The Deserted Village

And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main —
And, shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.
The good old sire the first prepared to go
To new-found worlds, and wept for others'
 woe ;

But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,
He only wished for worlds beyond the grave.

His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears,
The fond companion of his helpless years,
Silent went next, neglectful of her charms,
And left a lover's for a father's arms.
With louder plaints the mother spoke her
 woes,
And blessed the cot where every pleasure rose,
And kissed her thoughtless babes with many a
 tear,
And clasped them close, in sorrow doubly dear ;
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief
In all the silent manliness of grief.

O luxury ! thou curst by Heaven's decree,
How ill exchanged are things like these for
 thee !
How do thy potions, with insidious joy,
Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy !

The Deserted Village

Kingdoms, by thee to sickly greatness grown,
Boast of a florid vigour not their own :
At every draught more large and large they
grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe ;
Till, sapped their strength, and every part un-
sound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin
round.

Even now the devastation is begun,
And half the business of destruction done ;
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I
stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the
sail
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
Downward they move, a melancholy band,
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
Contented toil, and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness are there,
And piety with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty, and faithful love.
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade ;
Unfit, in these degenerate times of shame,
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame :

The Deserted Village

Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride ;
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe,
Thou found'st me poor at first, and keep'st
me so ;

Thou guide, by which the noble arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well !
Farewell ; and oh ! where'er thy voice be tried,
On Torno's cliffs,⁵ or Pambamarca's ⁶ side,
Whether where equinoctial fervors glow,
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
Redress the rigors of the inclement clime ;
Aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain ;
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain ;
Teach him, that states of native strength pos-
sessed,

Though very poor, may still be very blest ;
That trade's proud empire hastes to swift
decay,

As ocean sweeps the labored mole away ;
While self-dependent power can time defy,
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.⁷

5. Cliffs about Lake Tornea in northern Sweden.

6. A peak in the Andes of Ecuador.

7. It is said that the last four lines were added by Dr. Johnson.

Studies

Make a study of the descriptive passages in this poem. Both places and persons are described. For instance, there is the tavern: What is the "thorn that lifts its head on high"? What were the "nut-brown draughts"? What idea is given by "gray-beard mirth"? What by "smiling toil"? What idea of the times is given by "news much older than their ale"? What three classes of men are represented as frequenting the ale-house? Are young men present? Where are they at this time? Create a picture of the parlor. Was the wall lathed and plastered? Why was the floor sanded? What propriety is there in speaking of it as *nicely* sanded? Why should he mention the fact that the clock was varnished? Why say the clock *clicked*? Would it not be more natural to say it *ticked*? How does the clock look to you? Goldsmith tells us but three things: it was varnished, it clicked, it was behind the door. Did you ever see a clock in such a place? Was this high on the shelf behind the door? Can you see a "chest of drawers" that might be used as a bed at night? What connection can pictures have with "the royal game of goose"? How can pictures be for both ornament and use? Can you see the fireplace filled with blazing logs in winter and in summer decked

Studies

out with flowers and green branches? Do you see the broken teacups above the fire-place? Now have you pictured clearly to yourself the whole interior?

The village preacher is described: What *facts* do you learn about his personal appearance? Was he young or old? Was he rich or poor? Was he ambitious? What lines tell you? How many of his guests are mentioned? Was the first young or old? Why did the second claim kindred? What picture is suggested by the words "Shouldered his crutch and showed how fields were won"? Was the pastor generous? Was he wise in giving? What were the failings that leaned to virtue's side? Was he sympathetic? Was he willing to work for others? Did he drive his flock? Did he encourage them to do right? What reason is there for calling him a "reverend champion"? Did he ever abandon the sinful? How did he appear in the pulpit? Was he an eloquent preacher? Did his words carry weight with his congregation? Was he popular with his people? Were young and old alike his friends? What was the reason for the love the people bore him? What is the effect of the figure of speech in the last sentence descriptive of the parson? Does the preacher seem a very real person to you? Has Goldsmith accomplished this effect by detailed description or by suggestive words and happy figures? Is this a bit of real description?

Studies

Now in a similar way study the village schoolmaster. Compare him with the preacher. Compare the manner in which Goldsmith describes the two. Select several other descriptive passages. Which is the finest in the poem?

Does unity characterize the poem? What is the main idea, the one that binds its parts together? Are the parts consistent with the whole? Are the stanzas units? Does one stanza follow another logically? What is the effect of stanzas of such various length? What kind of poem is this? Is it a poem of the past? Has it any bearing on the present? What political or social ideas has it? Would such a schoolmaster be popular to-day? Would such a preacher have as great an influence to-day in one of your villages? What is said about luxury, about poetry, about wealth, about trade, about retirement? Do you feel that the poem has repaid the study you have given it?

21

The Widow and Her Son

WASHINGTON IRVING

The Widow and Her Son

Pittie olde age, within whose silver haire
Honour and reverence evermore have raig'n'd.

MARLOWE'S *Tamburlaine*.

During my residence in the country, I used frequently to attend at the old village church. Its shadowy aisles, its mouldering monuments, its dark oaken paneling, all reverend with the gloom of departed years, seemed to fit it for the haunt of solemn meditation. A Sunday, too, in the country, is so holy in its repose, such a pensive quiet reigns over the face of Nature, that every restless passion is charmed down, and we feel all the natural religion of the soul gently springing up within us.

“ Sweet day, so pure, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky ! ”

I cannot lay claim to the merit of being a devout man ; but there are feelings that visit me in a country church, amid the beautiful serenity of Nature, which I experience nowhere else ; and if not a more religious, I think I am a better man on Sunday than on any other day of the seven.

But in this church I felt myself continually

The Widow and Her Son

thrown back upon the world by the frigidity and pomp of the poor worms around me. The only being that seemed thoroughly to feel the humble and prostrate piety of a true Christian was a poor decrepit old woman, bending under the weight of years and infirmities. She bore the traces of something better than abject poverty. The lingerings of decent pride were visible in her appearance. Her dress, though humble in the extreme, was scrupulously clean. Some trivial respect, too, had been awarded her, for she did not take her seat among the village poor, but sat alone on the steps of the altar. She seemed to have survived all love, all friendship, all society, and to have nothing left her but the hopes of heaven. When I saw her feebly rising and bending her aged form in prayer ; habitually conning her prayer-book, which her palsied and failing eyes could not permit her to read, but which she evidently knew by heart, I felt persuaded that the faltering voice of that poor woman arose to heaven far before the responses of the clerk, the swell of the organ, or the chanting of the choir.

I am fond of loitering about country churches ; and this was so delightfully situated, that it frequently attracted me. It stood on a knoll, round which a small stream made a beautiful

The Widow and Her Son

bend, and then wound its way through a long reach of soft meadow scenery. The church was surrounded by yew trees, which seemed almost coeval with itself. Its tall Gothic spire shot up lightly from among them, with rooks and crows generally wheeling about it. I was seated there one still, sunny morning, watching two laborers who were digging a grave. They had chosen one of the most remote and neglected corners of the churchyard, where, by the number of nameless graves around, it would appear that the indigent and friendless were huddled into the earth. I was told that the new-made grave was for the only son of a poor widow. While I was meditating on the distinctions of worldly rank, which extend thus down into the very dust, the toll of the bell announced the approach of the funeral. They were the obsequies of poverty, with which pride had nothing to do. A coffin of the plainest materials, without pall or other covering, was borne by some of the villagers. The sexton walked before with an air of cold indifference. There were no mock mourners in the trappings of affected woe, but there was one real mourner who feebly tottered after the corpse. It was the aged mother of the deceased—the poor old woman whom I had

The Widow and Her Son

seen seated on the steps of the altar. She was supported by an humble friend, who was endeavoring to comfort her. A few of the neighboring poor had joined the train, and some children of the village were running hand in hand, now shouting with unthinking mirth, and now pausing to gaze, with childish curiosity, on the grief of the mourner.

As the funeral train approached the grave, the parson issued from the church porch, arrayed in the surplice, with prayer-book in hand, and attended by the clerk. The service, however, was a mere act of charity. The deceased had been destitute, and the survivor was penniless. It was shuffled through, therefore, in form, but coldly and unfeelingly. The well-fed priest moved but a few steps from the church door ; his voice could scarcely be heard at the grave ; and never did I hear the funeral service, that sublime and touching ceremony, turned into such a frigid mummary of words.

I approached the grave. The coffin was placed on the ground. On it were inscribed the name and age of the deceased — “George Somers, aged twenty-six years.” The poor mother had been assisted to kneel down at the head of it. Her withered hands were

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clasped, as if in prayer ; but I could perceive, by a feeble rocking of the body, and a convulsive motion of the lips, that she was gazing on the last relics of her son with the yearnings of a mother's heart.

Preparations were made to deposit the coffin in the earth. There was that bustling stir, which breaks so harshly on the feelings of grief and affection ; directions given in the cold tones of business ; the striking of spades into sand and gravel ; which, at the grave of those we love, is of all sounds the most withering. The bustle around seemed to waken the mother from a wretched reverie. She raised her glazed eyes, and looked about with a faint wildness. As the men approached with cords to lower the coffin into the grave, she wrung her hands, and broke into an agony of grief. The poor woman who attended her took her by the arm, endeavoring to raise her from the earth and to whisper something like consolation—"Nay, now—nay, now—don't take it so sorely to heart." She could only shake her head, and wring her hands, as one not to be comforted.

As they lowered the body into the earth, the creaking of the cords seemed to agonize her ; but when, on some accidental obstruction,

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there was a jostling of the coffin, all the tenderness of the mother burst forth ; as if any harm could come to him who was far beyond the reach of worldly suffering.

I could see no more — my heart swelled into my throat — my eyes filled with tears — I felt as if I were acting a barbarous part in standing by and gazing idly on this scene of maternal anguish. I wandered to another part of the churchyard, where I remained until the funeral train had dispersed.

When I saw the mother slowly and painfully quitting the grave, leaving behind her the remains of all that was dear to her on earth, and returning to silence and destitution, my heart ached for her. What, thought I, are the distresses of the rich ? They have friends to soothe — pleasures to beguile — a world to divert and dissipate their griefs. What are the sorrows of the young ? Their growing minds soon close above the wound — their elastic spirits soon rise beneath the pressure — their green and ductile affections soon twine around new objects. But the sorrows of the poor, who have no outward appliances to soothe — the sorrows of the aged, with whom life at best is but a wintry day, and who can look for no aftergrowth of joy — the

The Widow and Her Son

sorrows of a widow, aged, solitary, destitute, mourning over an only son, the last solace of her years ;— these are indeed sorrows which make us feel the impotency of consolation.

It was some time before I left the church-yard. On my way homeward, I met with the woman who had acted as comforter ; she was just returning from accompanying the mother to her lonely habitation, and I drew from her some particulars connected with the affecting scene I had witnessed.

The parents of the deceased had resided in the village from childhood. They had inhabited one of the neatest cottages, and by various rural occupations, and the assistance of a small garden, had supported themselves creditably, and comfortably, and led a happy and a blameless life. They had one son, who had grown up to be the staff and pride of their age — “ Oh, sir ! ” said the good woman, “ he was such a comely lad, so sweet-tempered, so kind to everyone around him, so dutiful to his parents ! It did one’s heart good to see him of a Sunday, drest out in his best, so tall, so straight, so cheery, supporting his old mother to church — for she was always fonder of leaning on George’s arm than on her good man’s ; and poor soul, she might well be proud of

The Widow and Her Son

him, for a finer lad there was not in the country round."

Unfortunately, the son was tempted, during a year of scarcity and agricultural hardship, to enter into the service of one of the small craft that plied on a neighboring river. He had not been long in this employ, when he was entrapped by a press-gang, and carried off to sea. His parents received tidings of his seizure, but beyond that they could learn nothing. It was the loss of their main prop. The father, who was already infirm, grew heartless and melancholy, and sunk into his grave. The widow, left lonely in her age and feebleness, could no longer support herself, and came upon the parish. Still there was a kind of feeling towards her throughout the village, and a certain respect as being one of the oldest inhabitants. As no one applied for the cottage in which she had passed so many happy days, she was permitted to remain in it, where she lived solitary and almost helpless. The few wants of nature were chiefly supplied from the scanty productions of her little garden, which the neighbors would now and then cultivate for her. It was but a few days before the time at which these circumstances were told me, that she was gathering some vegetables

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for her repast, when she heard the cottage-door which faced the garden suddenly opened. A stranger came out, and seemed to be looking eagerly and wildly around. He was dressed in seamen's clothes, was emaciated and ghastly pale, and bore the air of one broken by sickness and hardships. He saw her, and hastened towards her, but his steps were faint and faltering; he sank on his knees before her, and sobbed like a child. The poor woman gazed upon him with a vacant and wandering eye—"Oh my dear, dear mother! don't you know your son? your poor boy George?" It was, indeed, the wreck of her once noble lad; who, shattered by wounds, by sickness, and foreign imprisonment, had, at length, dragged his wasted limbs homeward, to repose among the scenes of his childhood.

I will not attempt to detail the particulars of such a meeting, where sorrow and joy were so completely blended: still he was alive!—he was come home!—he might yet live to comfort and cherish her old age! Nature, however, was exhausted in him; and if anything had been wanting to finish the work of fate, the desolation of his native cottage would have been sufficient. He stretched himself on

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the pallet on which his widowed mother had passed many a sleepless night, and he never rose from it again.

The villagers, when they heard that George Somers had returned, crowded to see him, offering every comfort and assistance that their humble means afforded. He was too weak, however, to talk—he could only look his thanks. His mother was his constant attendant, and he seemed unwilling to be helped by any other hand.

There is something in sickness that breaks down the pride of manhood ; that softens the heart, and brings it back to the feelings of infancy. Who that has languished, even in advanced life, in sickness and despondency ; who that has pined on a weary bed in the neglect and loneliness of a foreign land ; but has thought on the mother that “looked on his childhood,” that smoothed his pillow, and administered to his helplessness ? Oh ! there is an enduring tenderness in the love of a mother to a son, that transcends all other affections of the heart. It is neither to be chilled by selfishness, nor daunted by danger, nor weakened by worthlessness, nor stifled by ingratitude. She will sacrifice every comfort to his convenience ; she will surrender every pleasure

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to his enjoyment; she will glory in his fame, and exult in his prosperity;—and, if misfortune overtake him, he will be the dearer to her from misfortune; and if disgrace settle upon his name, she will still love and cherish him in spite of his disgrace; and if all the world beside cast him off, she will be all the world to him.

Poor George Somers had known what it was to be in sickness, and none to soothe—lonely and in prison, and none to visit him. He could not endure his mother from his sight; if she moved away, his eye would follow her. She would sit for hours by his bed, watching him as he slept. Sometimes he would start from a feverish dream, and look anxiously up until he saw her bending over him, when he would take her hand, lay it on his bosom, and fall asleep with the tranquillity of a child. In this way he died.

My first impulse, on hearing this humble tale of affliction, was to visit the cottage of the mourner, and administer pecuniary assistance, and if possible, comfort. I found, however, on inquiry, that the good feelings of the villagers had prompted them to do everything that the case admitted; and as the poor know best how to console each other's sorrows, I did not venture to intrude.

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The next Sunday I was at the village church ; when, to my surprise, I saw the poor old woman tottering down the aisle to her accustomed seat on the steps of the altar.

She had made an effort to put on something like mourning for her son ; and nothing could be more touching than this struggle between pious affection and utter poverty : a black ribbon or so — a faded black handkerchief — and one or two more such humble attempts to express by outward sign that grief which passes show.—When I looked round upon the storied monuments, the stately hatchments, the cold marble pomp, with which grandeur mourned magnificently over departed pride, and turned to this poor widow, bowed down by age and sorrow at the altar of her God, and offering up the prayers and praises of a pious, though a broken heart, I felt that this living monument of real grief was worth them all.

I related her story to some of the wealthy members of the congregation, and they were moved by it. They exerted themselves to render her situation more comfortable, and to lighten her afflictions. It was, however, but smoothing a few steps to the grave. In the course of a Sunday or two after, she was missed from her usual seat at church, and be-

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fore I left the neighborhood, I heard, with a feeling of satisfaction, that she had quietly breathed her last, and had gone to rejoin those she loved, in that world where sorrow is never known, and friends are never parted.

Some Thoughts, from Abroad

ROBERT BROWNING

Oh, to be in England now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some
 morning, unaware, [sheaf
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard
 bough
In England — now !

And after April, when May follows,
And the white-throat builds, and all the
 swallows !
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the
 hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's
 edge—
That's the wise thrush: he sings each song
 twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture ! [dew,
And though the fields look rough with hoary
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon flower !

Biographical Sketches

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John Keats

1795-1821

Not long before his death Keats wrote, — “If I should die, I have left no immortal work behind me, nothing to make my friends proud of my memory, but I have loved the principle of beauty in all things, and if I had had time I would have made myself remembered.” He is remembered, is famous, and the other sentence he framed as he lay dying, the epitaph on his tombstone in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, is as mistaken as the fear that prompted it: “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.” He was not twenty-six years of age when he died, but he had written a few perfect poems and had exerted a permanent influence on the poetry of his language.

What a mournful tragedy his life was! His father was a hostler in a livery stable and Keats's boyhood was passed in London. His parents were ambitious for their children but died when John was a boy. He was apprenticed to a surgeon but disliking surgery immensely he quarreled with his master just before the expiration of his term. At nineteen all his interests centered in poetry, and at twenty-one he decided to devote himself exclusively to it.

Always delicate in health and nervous in temperament, everything he undertook was done

John Keats

at the highest tension and in a manner most unsatisfactory to himself. He was an extremist in everything and his inability to accomplish what his ambition prompted was a source of constant irritation. But it was an irritation with himself that never reacted upon his friends and no one ever had friends whose devotion was so absolute and unselfish. "Sensitiveness and self-analysis were striking characteristics and though he often resolved to free himself from his morbid musings he could not throw off their thrall."

A long pedestrian trip through the English lake region and Scotland, taken with the hope of improving his health, was too arduous an undertaking and brought on the first symptoms of his fatal malady. On his return he nursed a brother through a fatal illness and suffered acutely in his sympathetic soul.

About this time he met the young woman with whom he fell desperately in love, whose image haunted him always and to whom he addressed passionate letters in his absence from her. Tormenting himself with his high aspirations which he felt he could scarcely realize, hounded by heartless critics who sneered at his pretensions and ridiculed his poetry, passionately in love but too proud to accept assistance and too sincere to marry with no assured income, and facing the certainty of ill health, is it any wonder that life was a burden to him and that when the first hemorrhage came from his lungs he recognized his death-warrant?

John Keats

Though kind friends surrounded him and tended him with a devotion that has no parallel, he steadily declined. A journey to Italy did little to relieve him and, suffering all the pangs of disappointed ambition and a hopeless love, he looked forward to death as a release, wondered when this "posthumous life" of his would come to an end and "felt the flowers growing over him." His friend Severn, who tended him with such assiduous care wrote — "about four the approaches of death came on. 'Severn — I — lift me up — I am dying — I shall die easy ; don't be frightened — be firm and thank God it has come.' I lifted him up in my arms — when he gradually sank into death, so quiet that I still thought he slept."

Keats's love of the beautiful was the inspiration of his life and of his poetry. The two years that preceded his first violent attack of illness were the period of his most finished work and what was written during that interval is thoroughly in keeping with his ideal. It is beautiful in form and in rhythm, and shows such a felicitous choice of word and figure that it charms the reader's every sense. Where can be found anything equal to the beauty of his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *To a Nightingale*, *On Indolence* and *To Psyche*? And then the matchless *Ode to Autumn* :

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun ;

Conspiring with him now to load and bless

John Keats

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-
eaves run ;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core ;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel
shells
With a sweet kernel ; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimmed their
clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store ?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind ;
Or on a half-reaped furrow, sound asleep
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while
thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined
flowers ;
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook ;
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by
hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where
are they?

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Think not of them, thou hast thy music too—
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hues ;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies ;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly
bourn ;
Hedge crickets sing ; and now with treble
soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft ;
And gathering swallows twitter in the
skies.

Whence came so delicate an appreciation of nature to the son of the city hostler ? Where did he learn to see and to feel the bountifulness of the harvest, the rich season of fruitage ? That first stanza is instinct with the life of generous autumn. But the second is different, though still preserving the most perfect unity of thought. It is the literary stanza, the stanza which gives rein to the imagination and clothes the spirit of autumn with a personality as vital and as graceful as classic models can furnish.

“Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind.”
But autumn is not bounteous only, nor is the classic spirit of rest its only sentiment. There is a hint of the maturity that precedes decay, a pensive feeling that all must change, a premonition of

John Keats

the approaching winter. The birds no longer sing, the small gnats see death approaching, the lambs are full-grown, the swallows are gathering for their long flight. If one cannot catch the poetic spirit of these stanzas he knows not Autumn or is not sensitive to the power of words.

Of his longer poems *Endymion* was the first and the one that called forth the biting criticism of his opponents. He realized its imperfections fully and criticised it as he did his other poems with an unflinching judgment. But he offered no apology, for he felt and said that he had done his best. *Hyperion*, *The Eve of St. Agnes* and *Lamia* are more mature poems, and mark the height of his powers and the beginning of their decline. Keats desired to win fame as a dramatist but his efforts in that direction were not a success. It is upon his lyrics that his fame rests, a fame that will be as lasting as the language itself.

The pathetic story of his life is essential to a thorough appreciation of his art, but he has not given us in his writings much trace of the incidents of his sorrowful career. Poetry was his very existence — he loved it and he lived it. His verses were as dear to him as his own heart's blood and a fame that rested on imperfect performance would have been more difficult to bear than the contemptuous jibes of his arrogant critics.

Speaking of one of the poet's most characteristic powers Lowell says: "Keats had an instinct for

John Keats

fine words, which are in themselves pictures and ideas, and had more the power of poetic expression than any modern English poet. And by poetic expression I do not mean merely a vividness in particulars, but the right feeling which heightens or subdues a passage or a whole poem to the proper tone and gives entireness to the effect. There is a great deal more than is commonly supposed in this choice of words. Men's thoughts and opinions are in a great degree vassals of him who invents a new phrase or reapplies an old epithet. . . . We reward the discoverer of an anesthetic for the body and make him member of all the societies, but him who finds a nepenthe for the soul we elect into the academy of the immortals."

Charles Dickens

1812-1870

Charles Dickens, the son of a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, was born at Portsea, England, in 1812. The father seemed entirely unfit to support his large family and when he moved with them into London his meager salary was less and less able to meet their demands. Little by little the family possessions went to satisfy creditors and finally when Charles was about twelve years of age everything had disappeared and the father was cast into prison for debt. The future novelist was left to take care of himself and learned by bitter experience the sufferings of the poor in a great city. What he could earn was a mere pittance and he often knew the pangs of hunger and suffered the weakness of an underfed child. It was a bitter struggle for bare subsistence and produced its effect upon the genius of the author for many of his characters are drawn from the poor with whom he was thrown in contact.

He had been a delicate and sickly child, but withal one of sweet disposition and winning ways. It is remarkable that he was not seriously corrupted by his associations, that he held manfully through life to the principles he formulated in childhood: "Whatever I have tried to do in life I have tried with all my heart to do well. What I

Charles Dickens

have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely. Never to put one hand to anything on which I could throw my whole self, and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was."

Ultimately the father obtained a good situation and Dickens following in his father's footsteps took up with great vigor the study of shorthand. With little assistance and no encouragement he worked away determinedly and at nineteen was a reporter in the House of Parliament for one of the city dailies.

His first original article or story was printed in 1834 and with it began his literary career, for reporting became at once a burdensome task.

His marriage occurred in 1836. About twenty years later, after his wife had borne him ten children, there was a separation, the eldest son going with the mother while the rest of the children remained with him and were cared for by their mother's sister who had been with them for many years. The incompatibility which separated them may not unlikely have been increased by the strange and violent attachment Dickens conceived early in his married life for another sister-in-law who died at the age of seventeen after having lived in the family. Dickens's extravagant love for this girl and his subsequent devotion to her memory could not have been a pleasant thing for the mother of his children to contemplate.

Charles Dickens

She is the original of *Little Nell* in *Old Curiosity Shop* and Dickens gave his best to the drawing of that perfect character. He could not write of her without being strongly affected and to describe the death of *Little Nell* was to live again through his sufferings when Mary died.

He grew wealthy from the sale of his books, read from them before large audiences and added materially to his fortune in so doing. He bought a beautiful home, Gad's Hill, which he had admired excessively in his childhood.

He visited America twice and traveled extensively in Europe, and was one of the best known and most honored men of his time. His death came suddenly in the summer of 1870, and was a shock to the entire world, leaders in politics and society as well as the poor, joining in genuine mourning. Daniel Webster said that Dickens "has done more to ameliorate the condition of the English poor than all the statesmen Great Britain has sent into Parliament." Carlyle called him "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens—every inch of him an honest man."

The publication of *The Pickwick Papers* was begun in the year he was married and though the first numbers were not remarkably popular the work grew rapidly in public favor and finally with the introduction of Sam Weller came a demand that soon made Dickens independent. From this point on Dickens's career was one of almost

Charles Dickens

unequaled prosperity. *David Copperfield* is the most popular of his novels and its interest is increased by the knowledge that much of its incident is autobiographical. *Oliver Twist*, the story of a poor boy unharmed by the vicious influences of his criminal associates in London, is a powerful and affecting work. *Nicholas Nickleby* is a strong story of the worst class of English boarding schools. *Dombey and Son* is a tale of the thwarted hopes of an ambitious father and the pathetic death of his odd little only son. *Old Curiosity Shop* touches the hearts of its readers through their interest in the wanderings of an old man and his lovely granddaughter. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a powerfully drawn tale of the French Revolution and abounds in thrilling episodes. His *Christmas Stories* are bright and seasonable, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Cricket on the Hearth* being among the best known and most popular.

George Gissing writes thus of him: "For his own fame, Dickens, I think, never puts his genius to better use than in the idealization of English life and character. Whatever in his work may be of doubtful interest to future time, here is its enduring feature. To be truly and profoundly national is great strength in the maker of literature. . . . Of humour he is the very incarnation. Dickens cannot think of his country without a sunny smile. In our hearts we love him for it, and so, surely, will the island people for many an age to come."

Dickens in Camp

BRET HARTE

Above the pines the moon was slowly drifting,
The river sang below ;
The dim Sierras, far beyond, uplifting
Their minarets of snow.

The roaring camp-fire, with rude humor
painted
The ruddy tints of health
On haggard face and form that drooped and
fainted
In the fierce race for wealth ;

Till one arose, and from his pack's scant treas-
ure
A hoarded volume drew,
And cards were dropped from hands of listless
leisure
To hear the tale anew ;

And then, while round them shadows gathered
faster,
And as the firelight fell,
He read aloud the book wherein the Master
Had writ of " Little Nell."

Perhaps 'twas boyish fancy,—for the reader
Was youngest of them all,—

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Boston.

Dickens in Camp

But, as he read, from clustering pine and cedar
A silence seemed to fall ;

The fir-trees, gathering closer in the shadows
Listened in every spray,
While the whole camp, with “ Nell ” on Eng-
lish meadows
Wandered and lost their way.

And so in mountain solitudes — o’ertaken
As by some spell divine
Their cares dropped from them like the
needles shaken
From out the gusty pine.

Lost is that camp, and wasted all its fire ;
And he who wrought that spell ?
Ah, towering pine and stately Kentish spire,
Ye have one tale to tell.

Lost is that camp ! but let its fragrant story
Blend with the breath that thrills
With hop-vines, incense all the pensive glory
That fills the Kentish hills.

And on that grave where English oak and
holly
And laurel wreaths intwine,
Deem it not all a too presumptuous folly,—
This spray of Western pine.

Oliver Goldsmith

1728-1774

To have written a charming novel, a beautiful poem and a successful drama is honor enough for any man. *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *The Deserted Village* and *She Stoops to Conquer* are the three masterpieces upon which rests Goldsmith's title to fame. Into each one of these he weaves some of the incidents and experiences of his life, some trait of character in the people whom he knew. The vicar is a loving sketch of his father in his little curacy in Ireland. The preacher in *The Deserted Village* is another delightful bit of portraiture and the schoolmaster in the same poem is Thomas Byrne or "Paddy" in whose school Goldsmith blundered at his lessons but did achieve some taste for poetry or at least for the jingles his traveled pedagogue could construct. The plot of *She Stoops to Conquer* is based on an amusing incident in his boyhood. At sixteen, being on his way home from school and having a guinea in his pocket he traveled with the air of a lord in waiting. At a little village he inquired in what he conceived to be a magnificent manner for the best inn in the place. A local wag, seizing the opportunity for a joke, directed him to the home of the wealthiest man in the vicinity. Goldsmith rode up, gave orders for the care of his horse and

Oliver Goldsmith

strode into the parlor, making himself entirely at home. The family soon saw the mistake under which the youth was laboring and humored him to the utmost. He ordered his meal, invited the family to sit with him, treated them to an extra fine bottle of wine and finally went off to bed leaving orders for breakfast in the morning. Before he left the place he learned of his blunder and departed in the greatest mortification.

This little story is given because it is so characteristic of the man. He was always in trouble, always blundering in everything he undertook. Everybody laughed at his expense and made him the subject of jests and practical jokes without number. In conversation he wandered about in thoughts that were never logical. His manners were awkward and annoying and he dressed, when he had the means, in the most glaring colors and ridiculous fashion. His squat figure, shambling gait and pock-marked face made one think that Nature had begun the joke his friends were carrying on. When in one of his brief intervals of prosperity, he spent his money like a king, heedless of its rapid exhaustion; when in abject poverty or deeply in debt, as he was most of the time, he resorted to any occupation that would bring in a little money, and late in life he earned most of his subsistence by his pen in the sorriest kind of hackwork.

But he was a jolly, whole-souled fellow, full of drollery and no better pleased than when he could

Oliver Goldsmith

gather about him a group of fun-loving friends for a noisy, almost childish romp. And he had friends in plenty, particularly as he became more famous, and in spite of his poverty they clung faithfully to him. Perhaps Thackeray's characterization is as fair as any, though written long after Goldsmith's death: "To be the most beloved of English writers, what a title that is for a man," and again, "Think of him, reckless, thoughtless, vain, if you like—but merciful, gentle, generous, full of love and pity. His humor delighting us still; his song fresh and beautiful as when first he chanted it; his words in all our mouths; his very weaknesses beloved and familiar; his benevolent spirit seems still to shine on us; to do gentle kindnesses; to succor with sweet charity; to soothe, caress and forgive; to plead with the fortunate for the unhappy and the poor."

His generosity and charity were often as extravagant as his other habits. At Trinity College he was entered as a sizar, a student working for his board who wore as the badge of his servitude a distinguishing uniform. Yet in this trying and humble position he found means to be absurdly generous. A widow and children so worked upon his sympathy that for their benefit he parted with his bedding and some of his own clothing, and his classmates entering the room one cold morning found "Goldy" immersed to his neck among the feathers in the bed-tick which he had opened.

Oliver Goldsmith

He was born in a little village in Ireland, November 10, 1728. He was not a successful scholar as a child nor in college but finally, at the age of twenty-one, graduated the lowest in his class. Until 1764 he was a wanderer in search of a profession trying nearly every occupation that he could find; then he published *The Traveler* and so began his successful career in literature. For ten years longer he wrote, gaining more friends and greater fame but also increasing his debts and growing morose and despondent in contemplation of them. Then in April of 1774 he died, and his friend and champion, Dr. Johnson, wrote: "He died of a fever, made, I am afraid, more violent by uneasiness of mind. His debts began to grow heavy, and all his resources were exhausted. Sir Joshua is of the opinion that he owed not less than two thousand pounds. Was ever poet so trusted before?" Edmund Burke, his college-mate and life-long friend, wept when he heard the news, and the poor and miserable people whom he had so often befriended bewailed his loss and would not be comforted.

Washington Irving writes thus: "There are few writers for whom the reader feels such personal kindness as Oliver Goldsmith. The fascinating ease and simplicity of his style; the benevolence that beams through every page; the whimsical yet amiable views of human life and human nature; the mellow, unforced humor blended so happily

Oliver Goldsmith

with good feeling and good sense throughout his writings in their way irresistibly to the affections and carry the author with them. While writers of greater pretensions and more sounding names are suffered to lie upon our shelves, the works of Goldsmith are cherished and laid in our bosoms. We do not quote them with ostentation, but they mingle with our minds ; they sweeten our tempers and harmonize our thoughts ; they put us in good humor with ourselves and with the world ; and in so doing they make us happier and better men."

